# Domestic Girlfriend

17

KEI SASUGA

DOME X GIRL

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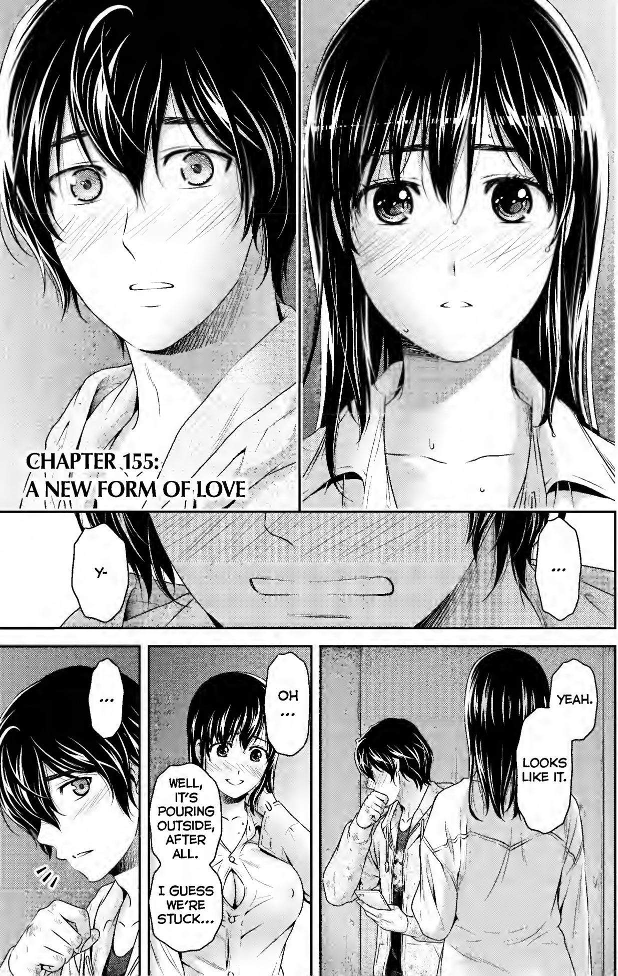
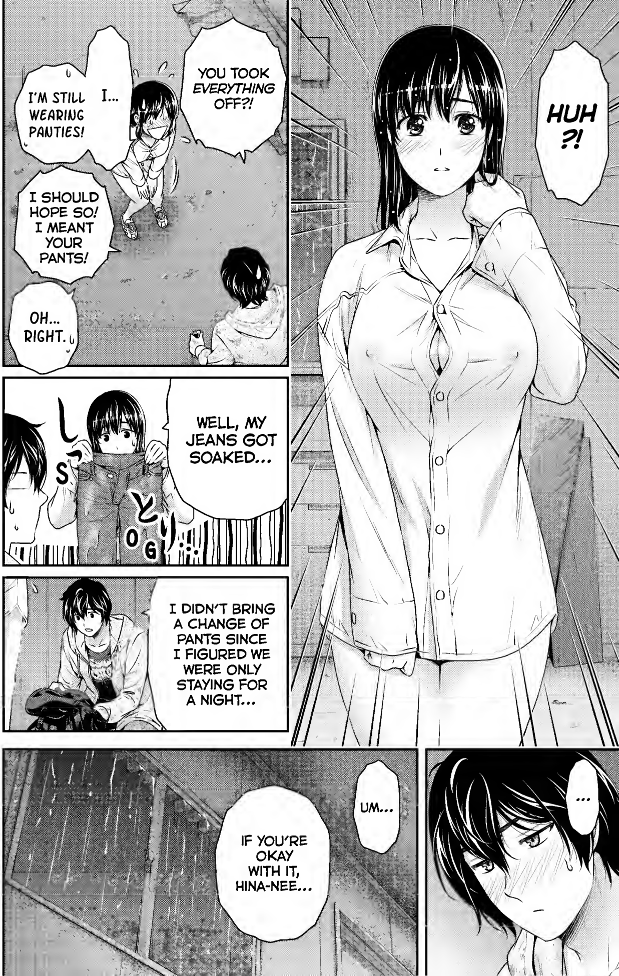
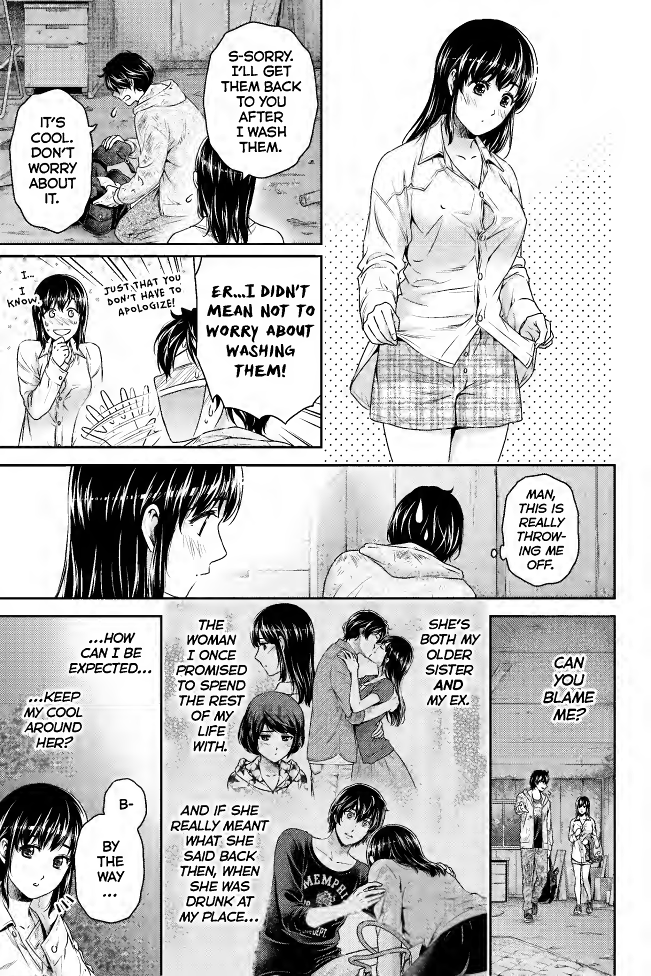
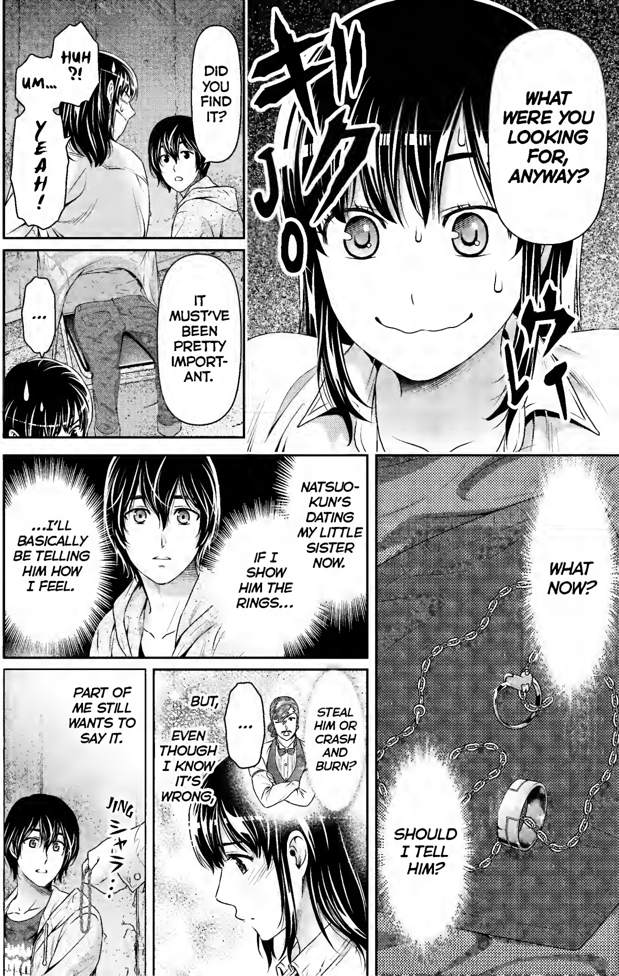
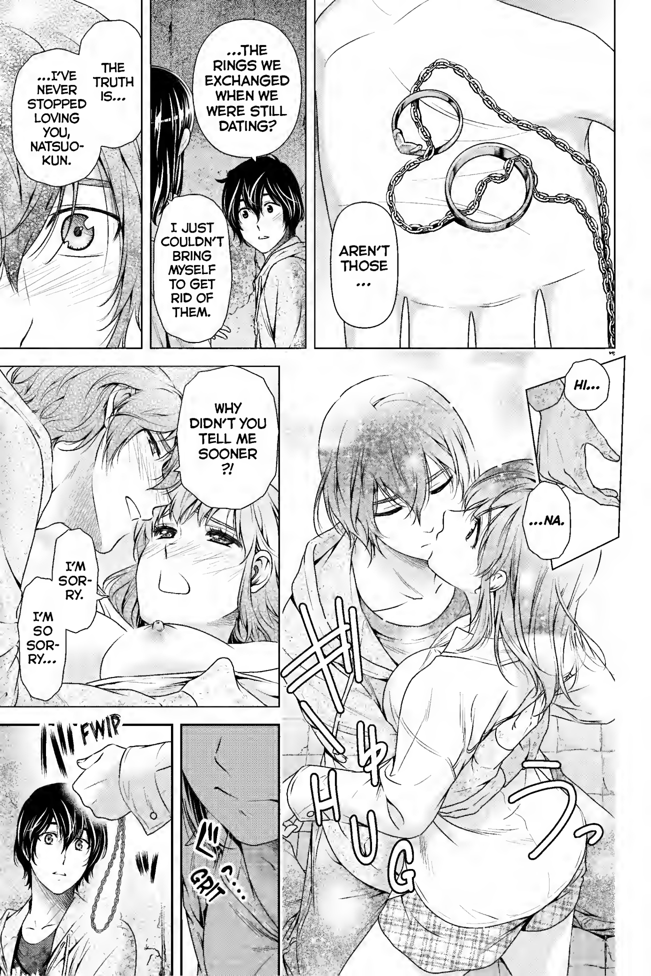
# CHAPTER 155:
# A NEW FORM OF LOVE

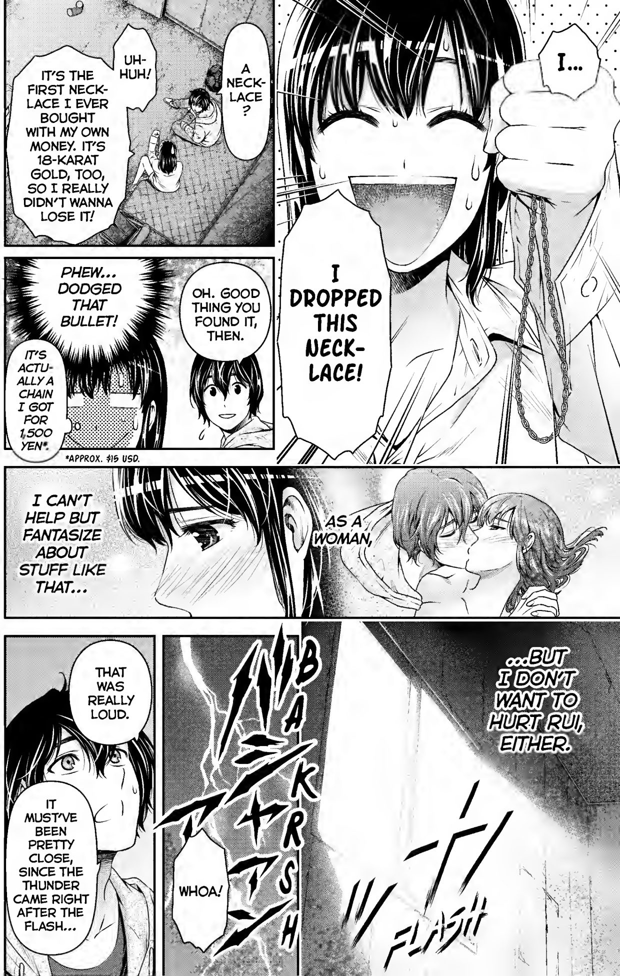

...
Y-
YEAH.
LOOKS LIKE IT.
OH ...
WELL, IT'S POURING OUTSIDE, AFTER ALL.
I GUESS WE'RE STUCK...
...


HUH?!
YOU TOOK EVERYTHING OFF?!
I...
I'M STILL WEARING PANTIES!
I SHOULD HOPE SO! I MEANT YOUR PANTS!
OH... RIGHT.
WELL, MY JEANS GOT SOAKED...
しっ S
とり... OG
I DIDN'T BRING A CHANGE OF PANTS SINCE I FIGURED WE WERE ONLY STAYING FOR A NIGHT...
...
UM...
IF YOU'RE OKAY WITH IT, HINA-NEE...

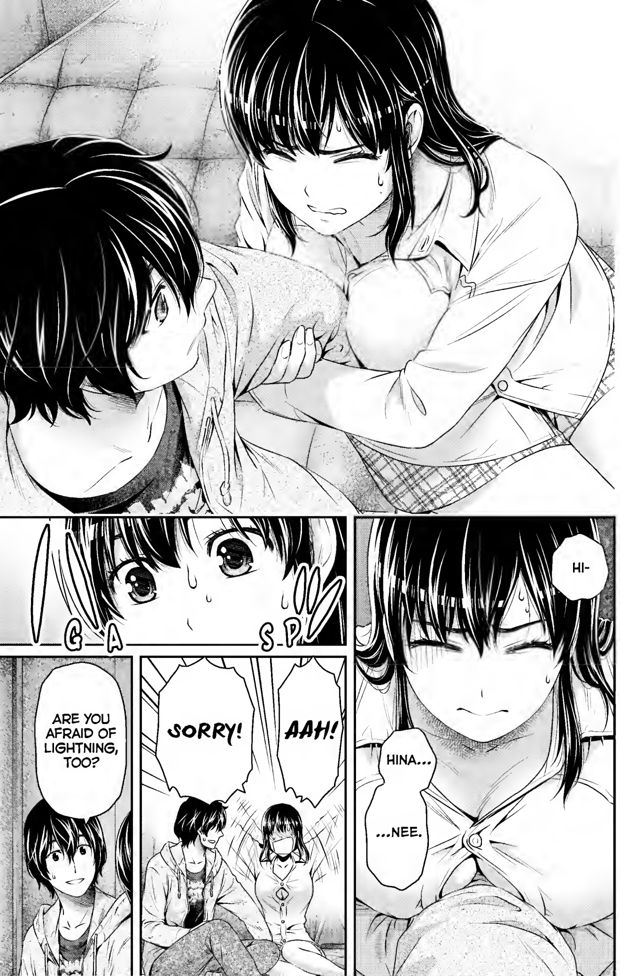

S-SORRY. I'LL GET THEM BACK TO YOU AFTER I WASH THEM.
IT'S COOL. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.
ER...I DIDN'T MEAN NOT TO WORRY ABOUT WASHING THEM!
JUST THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE!
I... I KNOW.
MAN, THIS IS REALLY THROWING ME OFF.
CAN YOU BLAME ME?
SHE'S BOTH MY OLDER SISTER AND MY EX.
THE WOMAN I ONCE PROMISED TO SPEND THE REST OF MY LIFE WITH.
AND IF SHE REALLY MEANT WHAT SHE SAID BACK THEN, WHEN SHE WAS DRUNK AT MY PLACE...
...HOW CAN I BE EXPECTED...
...KEEP MY COOL AROUND HER?
B- BY THE WAY...

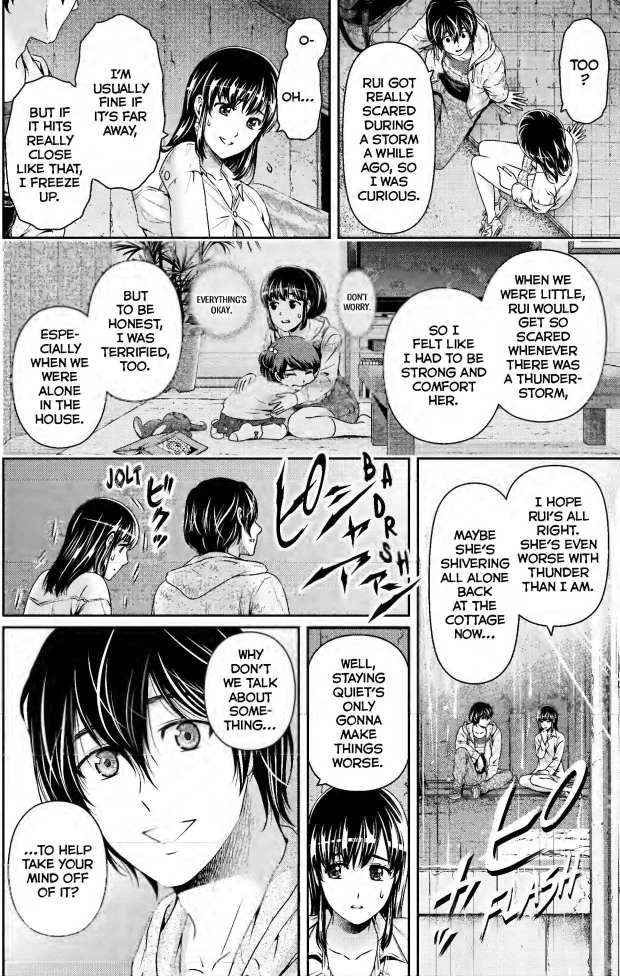

DID YOU FIND IT?
HUH ?!
UM...
YEAH!
IT MUST'VE BEEN PRETTY IMPORTANT.
...
WHAT WERE YOU LOOKING FOR, ANYWAY?
ギクッ
JO
WHAT NOW?
SHOULD I TELL HIM?
NATSUO-KUN'S DATING MY LITTLE SISTER NOW.
IF I SHOW HIM THE RINGS...
...I'LL BASICALLY BE TELLING HIM HOW I FEEL.
STEAL HIM OR CRASH AND BURN?
...
BUT, EVEN THOUGH I KNOW IT'S WRONG,
PART OF ME STILL WANTS TO SAY IT.
JING
シャラ...

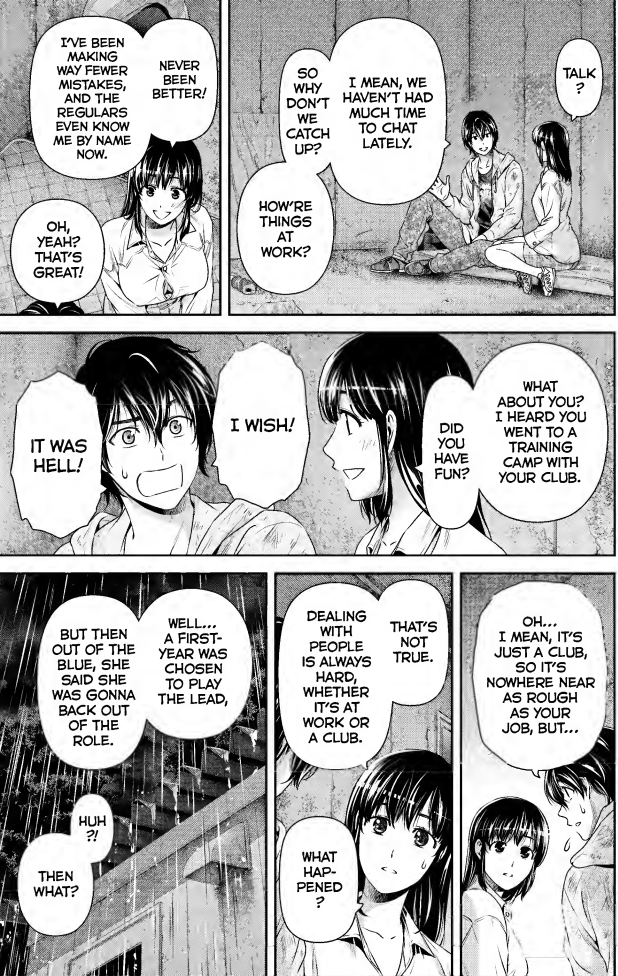

AREN'T THOSE ...
...THE RINGS WE EXCHANGED WHEN WE WERE STILL DATING?
I JUST COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO GET RID OF THEM.
THE TRUTH IS...
...I'VE NEVER STOPPED LOVING YOU, NATSUO-KUN.
HI...
...NA.
HUG
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME SOONER ?!
I'M SORRY.
I'M SO SORRY...
GRIT
FWIP

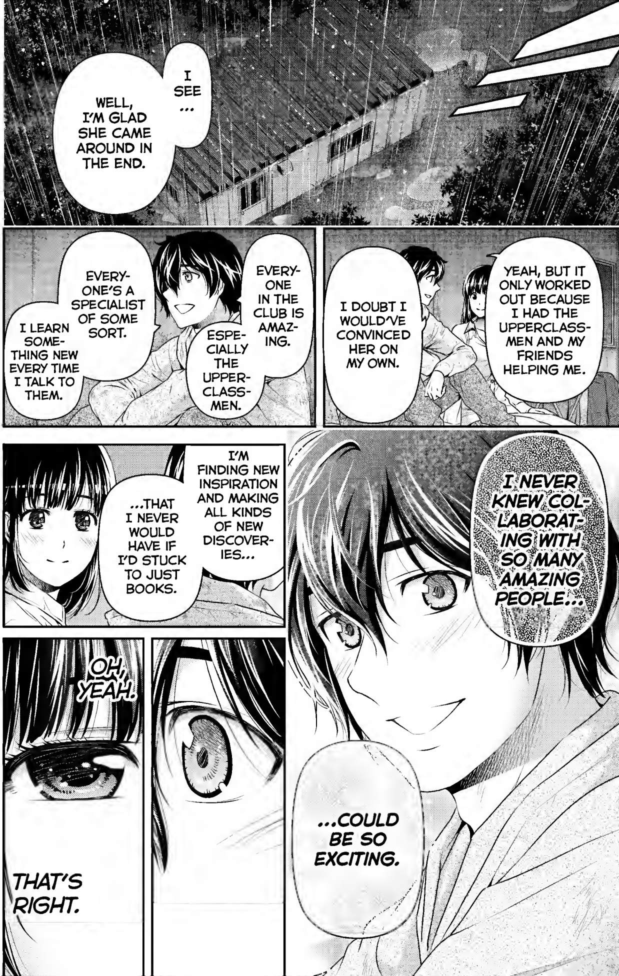

I...
I DROPPED THIS NECKLACE!
A NECKLACE?
UH-HUH!
IT'S THE FIRST NECKLACE I EVER BOUGHT WITH MY OWN MONEY. IT'S 18-KARAT GOLD, TOO, SO I REALLY DIDN'T WANNA LOSE IT!
OH. GOOD THING YOU FOUND IT, THEN.
PHEW... DODGED THAT BULLET!
IT'S ACTUALLY A CHAIN I GOT FOR 1,500 YEN*.
AS A WOMAN,
I CAN'T HELP BUT FANTASIZE ABOUT STUFF LIKE THAT...
...BUT I DON'T WANT TO HURT RUI, EITHER.
FLASH
BAKRSH
WHOA!
THAT WAS REALLY LOUD.
IT MUST'VE BEEN PRETTY CLOSE, SINCE THE THUNDER CAME RIGHT AFTER THE FLASH...

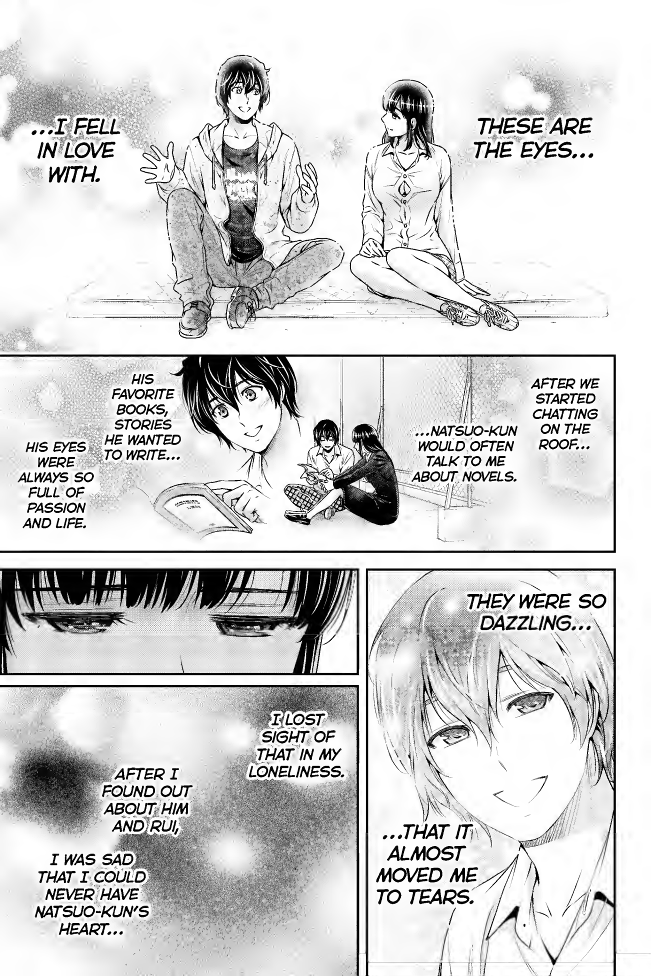
*APPROX. $15 USD.

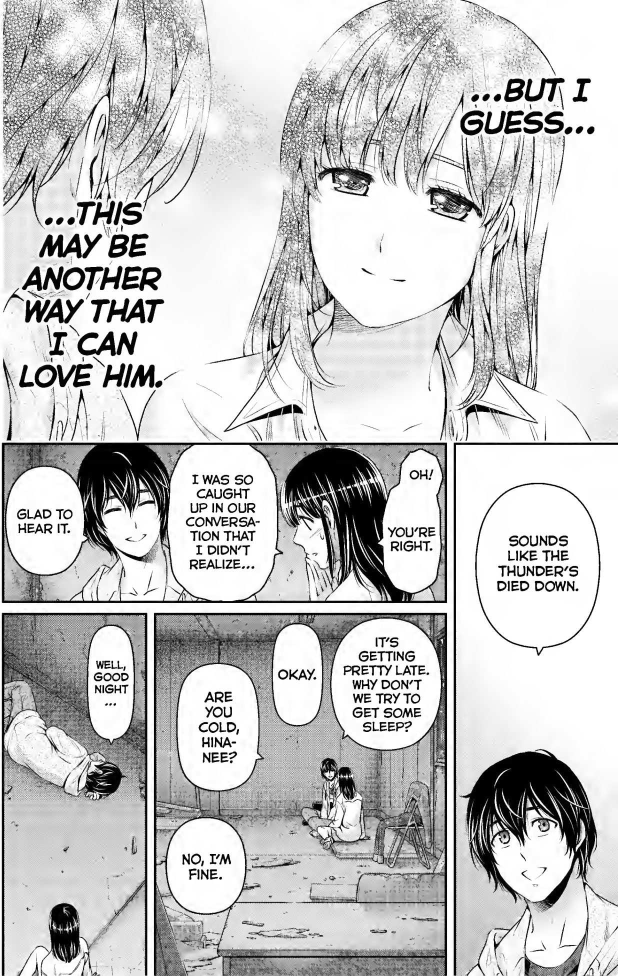

HI-
HINA...
...NEE.
GASP
AAH!
SORRY!
ARE YOU AFRAID OF LIGHTNING, TOO?

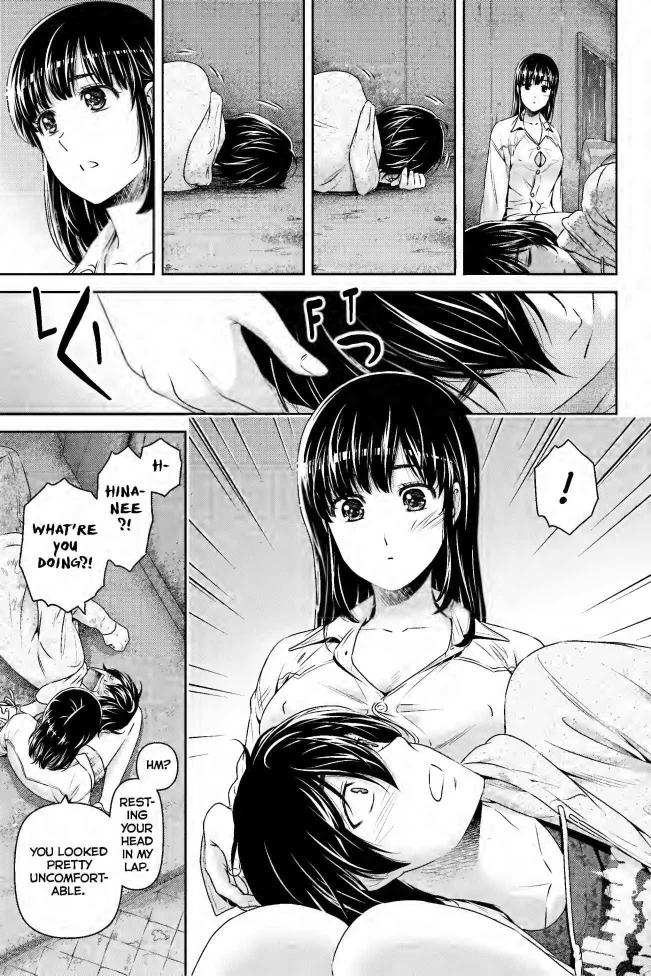

TOO?
RUI GOT REALLY SCARED DURING A STORM A WHILE AGO, SO I WAS CURIOUS.
O-
OH...
I'M USUALLY FINE IF IT'S FAR AWAY,
BUT IF IT HITS REALLY CLOSE LIKE THAT, I FREEZE UP.
WHEN WE WERE LITTLE, RUI WOULD GET SO SCARED WHENEVER THERE WAS A THUNDERSTORM,
SO I FELT LIKE I HAD TO BE STRONG AND COMFORT HER.
DON'T WORRY.
EVERYTHING'S OKAY.
BUT TO BE HONEST, I WAS TERRIFIED, TOO.
ESPECIALLY WHEN WE WERE ALONE IN THE HOUSE.
I HOPE RUI'S ALL RIGHT. SHE'S EVEN WORSE WITH THUNDER THAN I AM.
MAYBE SHE'S SHIVERING ALL ALONE BACK AT THE COTTAGE NOW...
FLASH
BADRSH
JOLT
WELL, STAYING QUIET'S ONLY GONNA MAKE THINGS WORSE.
WHY DON'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING...
...TO HELP TAKE YOUR MIND OFF OF IT?


TALK?
I MEAN, WE HAVEN'T HAD MUCH TIME TO CHAT LATELY.
SO WHY DON'T WE CATCH UP?
HOW'RE THINGS AT WORK?
NEVER BEEN BETTER!
I'VE BEEN MAKING WAY FEWER MISTAKES, AND THE REGULARS EVEN KNOW ME BY NAME NOW.
OH, YEAH? THAT'S GREAT!
WHAT ABOUT YOU? I HEARD YOU WENT TO A TRAINING CAMP WITH YOUR CLUB.
DID YOU HAVE FUN?
I WISH!
IT WAS HELL!
OH... I MEAN, IT'S JUST A CLUB, SO IT'S NOWHERE NEAR AS ROUGH AS YOUR JOB, BUT...
THAT'S NOT TRUE.
DEALING WITH PEOPLE IS ALWAYS HARD, WHETHER IT'S AT WORK OR A CLUB.
WHAT HAPPENED?
WELL... A FIRST-YEAR WAS CHOSEN TO PLAY THE LEAD,
BUT THEN OUT OF THE BLUE, SHE SAID SHE WAS GONNA BACK OUT OF THE ROLE.
HUH?!
THEN WHAT?

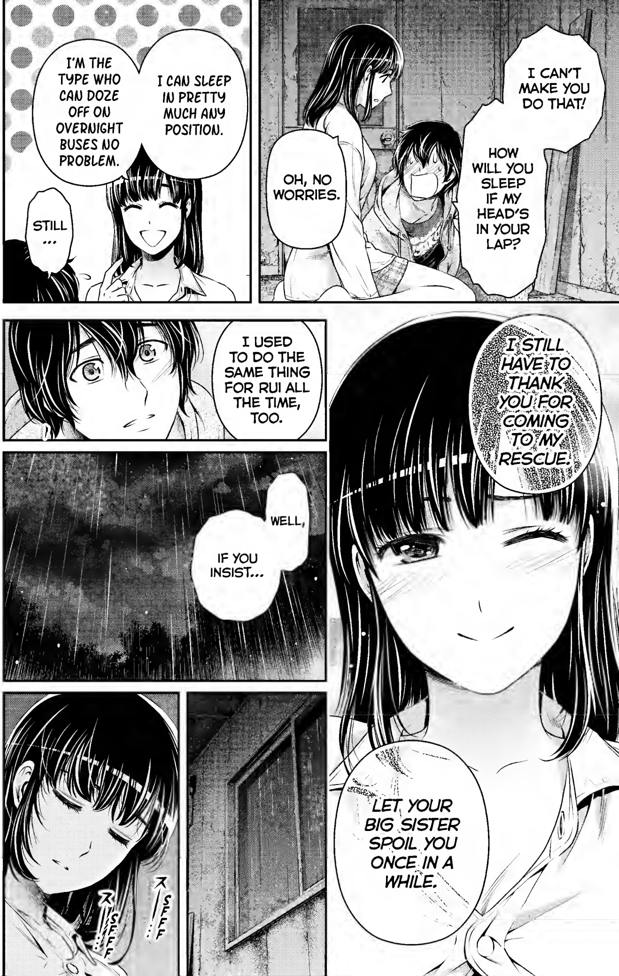

I SEE...
WELL, I'M GLAD SHE CAME AROUND IN THE END.
YEAH, BUT IT ONLY WORKED OUT BECAUSE I HAD THE UPPERCLASSMEN AND MY FRIENDS HELPING ME.
I DOUBT I WOULD'VE CONVINCED HER ON MY OWN.
EVERYONE IN THE CLUB IS AMAZING.
ESPECIALLY THE UPPERCLASSMEN.
EVERYONE'S A SPECIALIST OF SOME SORT.
I LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY TIME I TALK TO THEM.
I'M FINDING NEW INSPIRATION AND MAKING ALL KINDS OF NEW DISCOVERIES...
...THAT I NEVER WOULD HAVE IF I'D STUCK TO JUST BOOKS.
I NEVER KNEW COLLABORATING WITH SO MANY AMAZING PEOPLE...
...COULD BE SO EXCITING.
OH, YEAH.
THAT'S RIGHT.

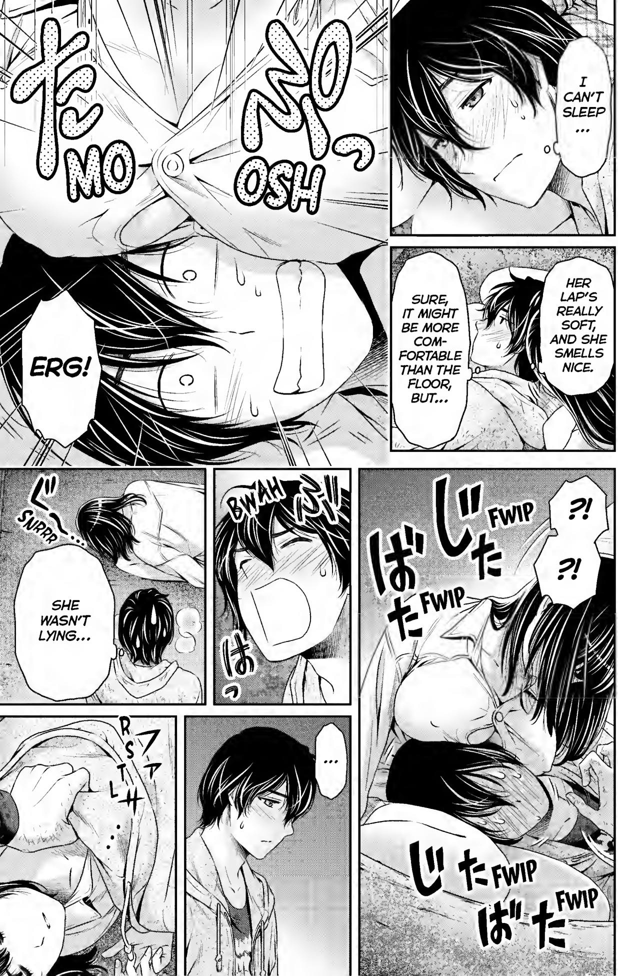

THESE ARE THE EYES...
...I FELL IN LOVE WITH.
AFTER WE STARTED CHATTING ON THE ROOF...
...NATSUO-KUN WOULD OFTEN TALK TO ME ABOUT NOVELS.
HIS FAVORITE BOOKS, STORIES HE WANTED TO WRITE...
HIS EYES WERE ALWAYS SO FULL OF PASSION AND LIFE.
THEY WERE SO DAZZLING...
...THAT IT ALMOST MOVED ME TO TEARS.
AFTER I FOUND OUT ABOUT HIM AND RUI,
I WAS SAD THAT I COULD NEVER HAVE NATSUO-KUN'S HEART...
I LOST SIGHT OF THAT IN MY LONELINESS.

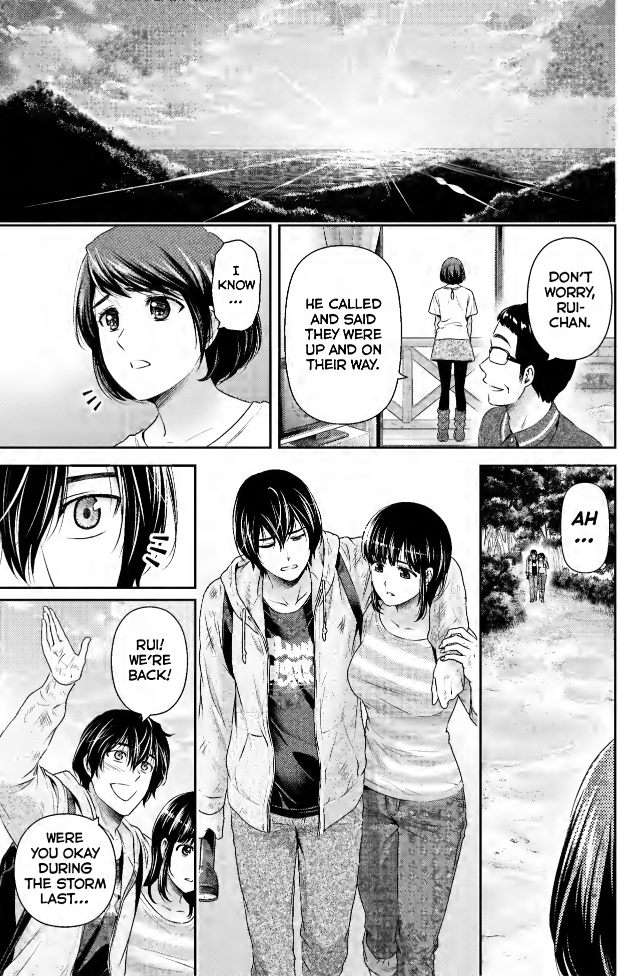

...BUT I GUESS...
...THIS MAY BE ANOTHER WAY THAT I CAN LOVE HIM.
SOUNDS LIKE THE THUNDER'S DIED DOWN.
OH!
YOU'RE RIGHT.
I WAS SO CAUGHT UP IN OUR CONVERSATION THAT I DIDN'T REALIZE...
GLAD TO HEAR IT.
IT'S GETTING PRETTY LATE. WHY DON'T WE TRY TO GET SOME SLEEP?
OKAY.
ARE YOU COLD, HINA-NEE?
NO, I'M FINE.
WELL, GOOD NIGHT...

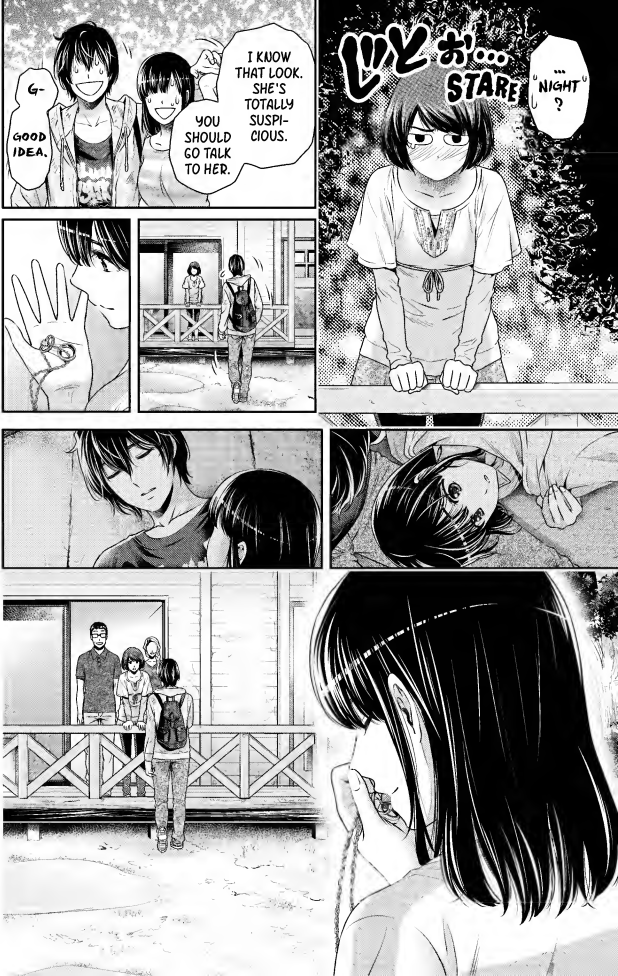


FT
!
H-
HINA-NEE?!
WHAT'RE YOU DOING?!
HM?
RESTING YOUR HEAD IN MY LAP.
YOU LOOKED PRETTY UNCOMFORTABLE.


I CAN'T MAKE YOU DO THAT!
HOW WILL YOU SLEEP IF MY HEAD'S IN YOUR LAP?
OH, NO WORRIES.
I CAN SLEEP IN PRETTY MUCH ANY POSITION.
I'M THE TYPE WHO CAN DOZE OFF ON OVERNIGHT BUSES NO PROBLEM.
STILL...
I STILL HAVE TO THANK YOU FOR COMING TO MY RESCUE.
I USED TO DO THE SAME THING FOR RUI ALL THE TIME, TOO.
LET YOUR BIG SISTER SPOIL YOU ONCE IN A WHILE.
WELL, IF YOU INSIST...
ス… SFFF
ス… SFFF

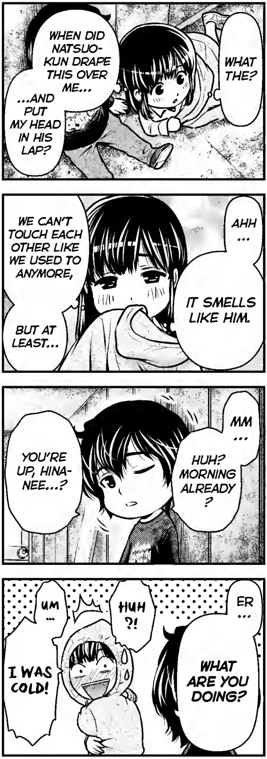

I CAN'T SLEEP...
HER LAP'S REALLY SOFT, AND SHE SMELLS NICE.
SURE, IT MIGHT BE MORE COMFORTABLE THAN THE FLOOR, BUT...
MO MOSH
ERG!
?!
?!
じた FWIP
ばた FWIP
じた FWIP
ばた FWIP
BWAH ぶはっ
SNRRR
SHE WASN'T LYING...
...
RSTL


DON'T WORRY, RUI-CHAN.
HE CALLED AND SAID THEY WERE UP AND ON THEIR WAY.
I KNOW...
AH...
RUI! WE'RE BACK!
WERE YOU OKAY DURING THE STORM LAST...

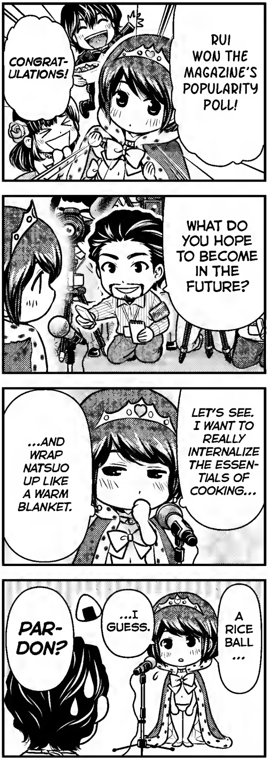

じとぉ…
STARE
...NIGHT?
I KNOW THAT LOOK. SHE'S TOTALLY SUSPICIOUS.
YOU SHOULD GO TALK TO HER.
G- GOOD IDEA.

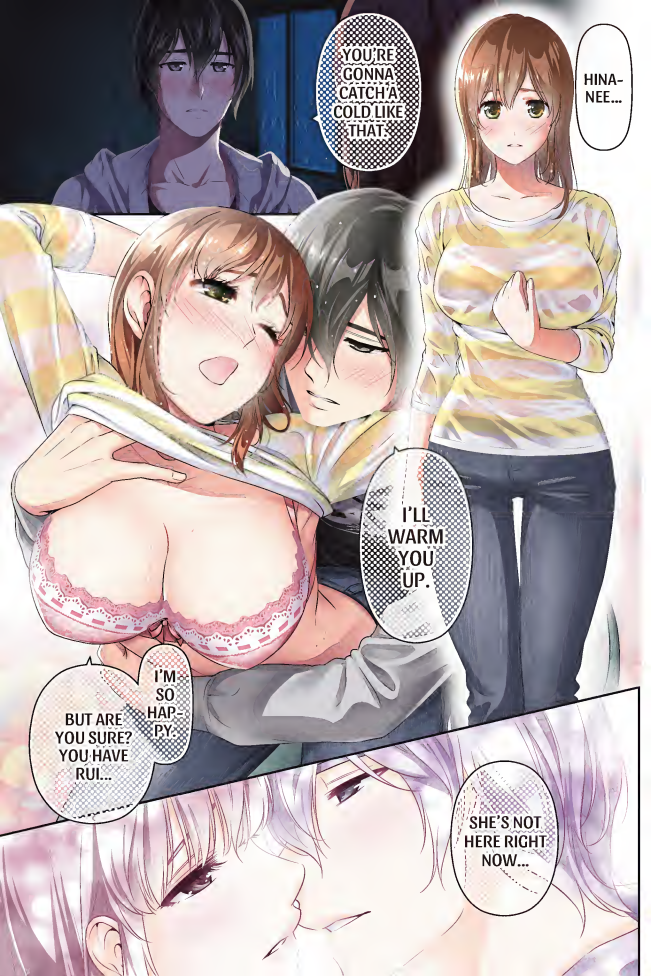
# DG 4-PANEL THEATER

## SCENT

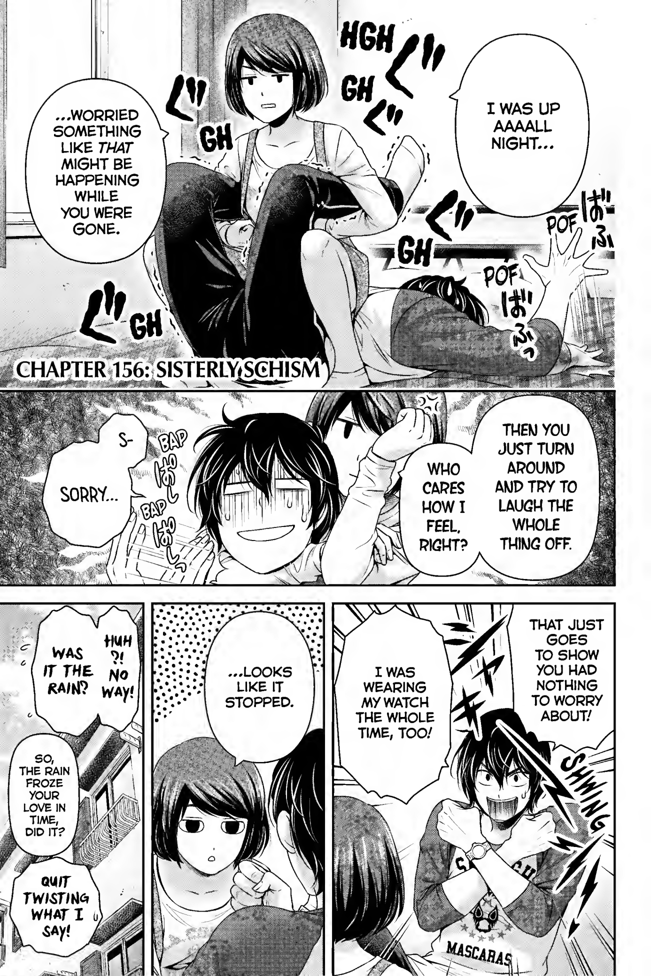

WHAT THE?
WHEN DID NATSUO-KUN DRAPE THIS OVER ME...
...AND PUT MY HEAD IN HIS LAP?
AHH ...
IT SMELLS LIKE HIM.
WE CAN'T TOUCH EACH OTHER LIKE WE USED TO ANYMORE,
BUT AT LEAST...
MM ...
HUH? MORNING ALREADY ?
YOU'RE UP, HINA-NEE...?
ER ...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HUH ?!
UM ...
I WAS COLD!

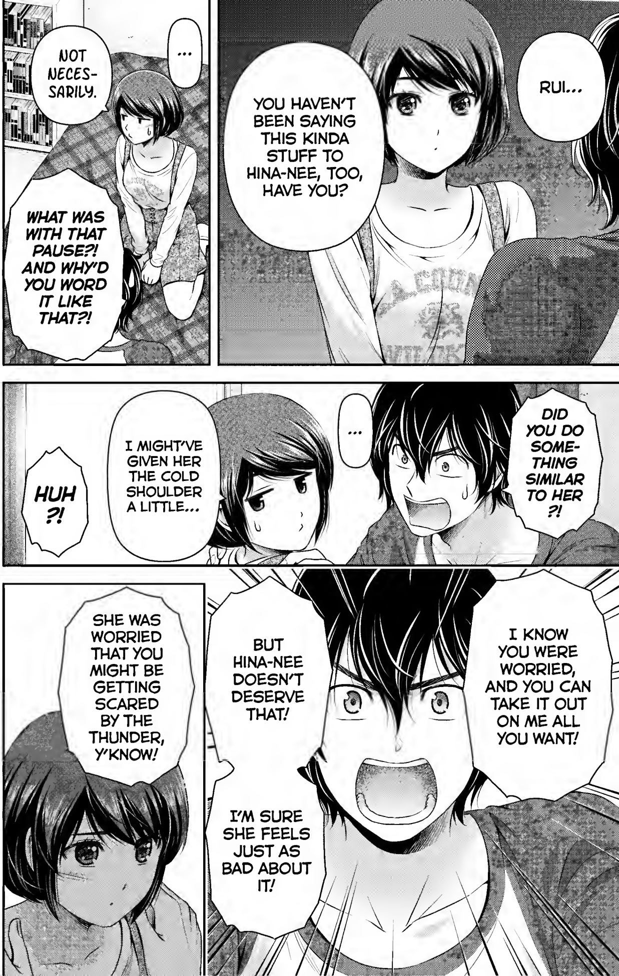
## GOAL

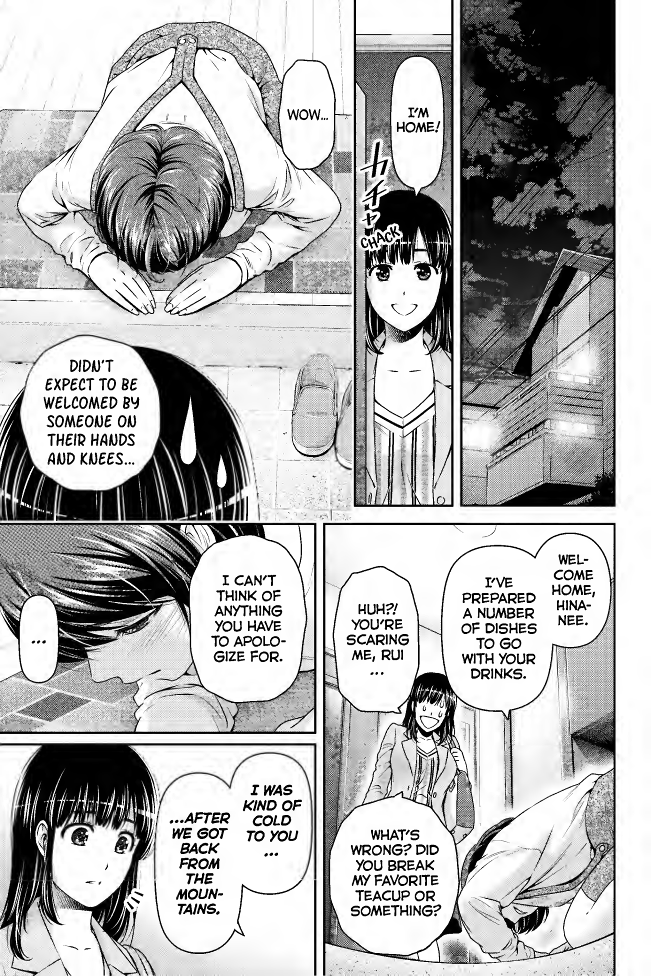

RUI WON THE MAGAZINE'S POPULARITY POLL!
CONGRAT-ULATIONS!
WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO BECOME IN THE FUTURE?
LET'S SEE. I WANT TO REALLY INTERNALIZE THE ESSEN-TIALS OF COOKING...
...AND WRAP NATSUO UP LIKE A WARM BLANKET.
A RICE BALL ...
...I GUESS.
PAR-DON?

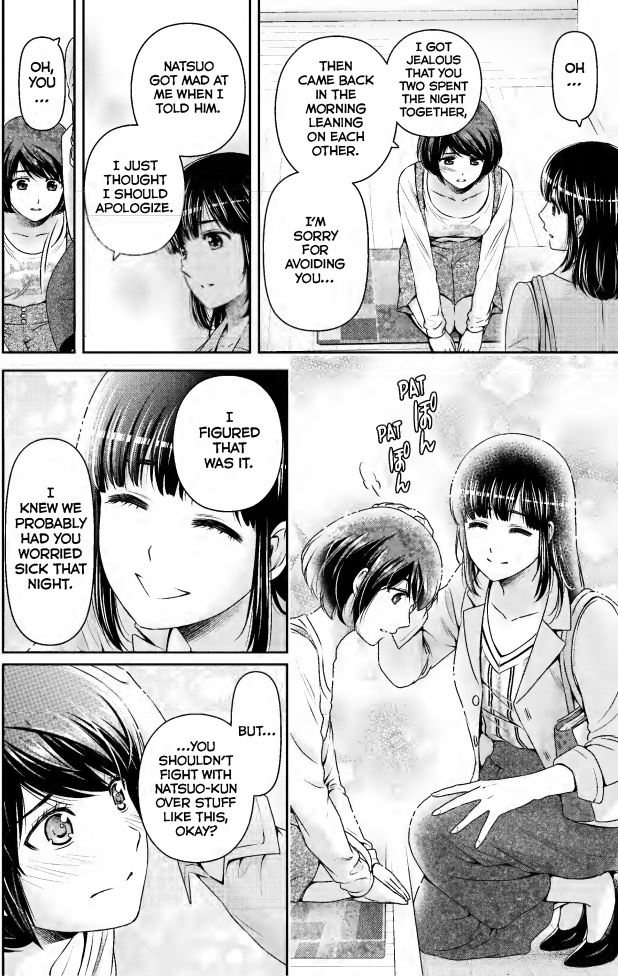

HINA-NEE...
YOU'RE GONNA CATCH A COLD LIKE THAT.
I'LL WARM YOU UP.
I'M SO HAPPY.
BUT ARE YOU SURE? YOU HAVE RUI...
SHE'S NOT HERE RIGHT NOW...

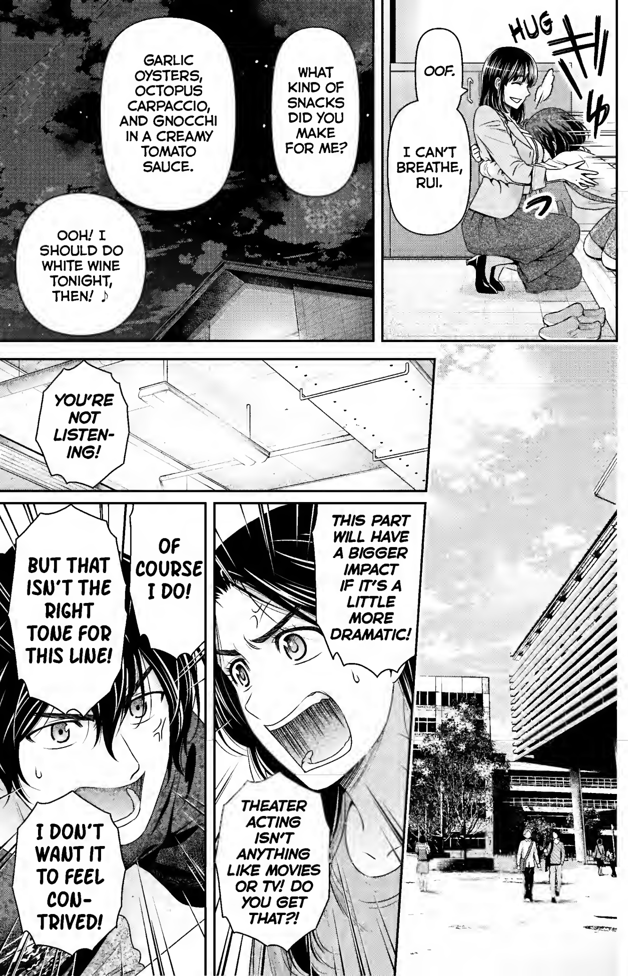
# CHAPTER 156: SISTERLY SCHISM

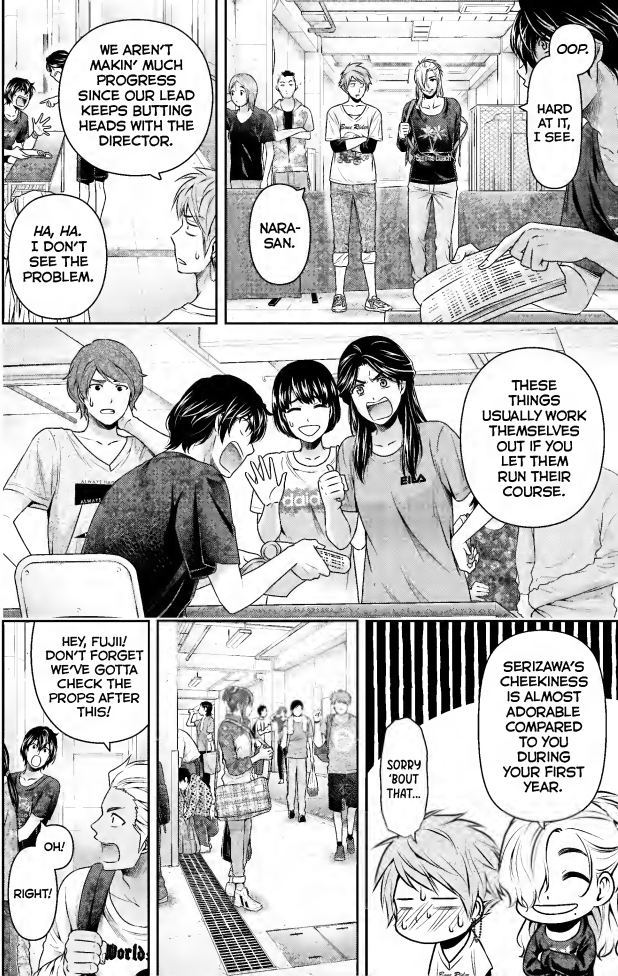

HGH ぐい
GH ぐ
I WAS UP AAAALL NIGHT...
ぐい GH
POF ぼふ
POF ぼふっ
...WORRIED SOMETHING LIKE *THAT* MIGHT BE HAPPENING WHILE YOU WERE GONE.
ぐい GH
ぐい GH
THEN YOU JUST TURN AROUND AND TRY TO LAUGH THE WHOLE THING OFF.
WHO CARES HOW I FEEL, RIGHT?
BAP ぽし
BAP ぽしっ
S- SORRY...
THAT JUST GOES TO SHOW YOU HAD NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!
SHWING
I WAS WEARING MY WATCH THE WHOLE TIME, TOO!
MASCARAS
...LOOKS LIKE IT STOPPED.
HUH?! NO WAY!
WAS IT THE RAIN?
SO, THE RAIN FROZE YOUR LOVE IN TIME, DID IT?
QUIT TWISTING WHAT I SAY!

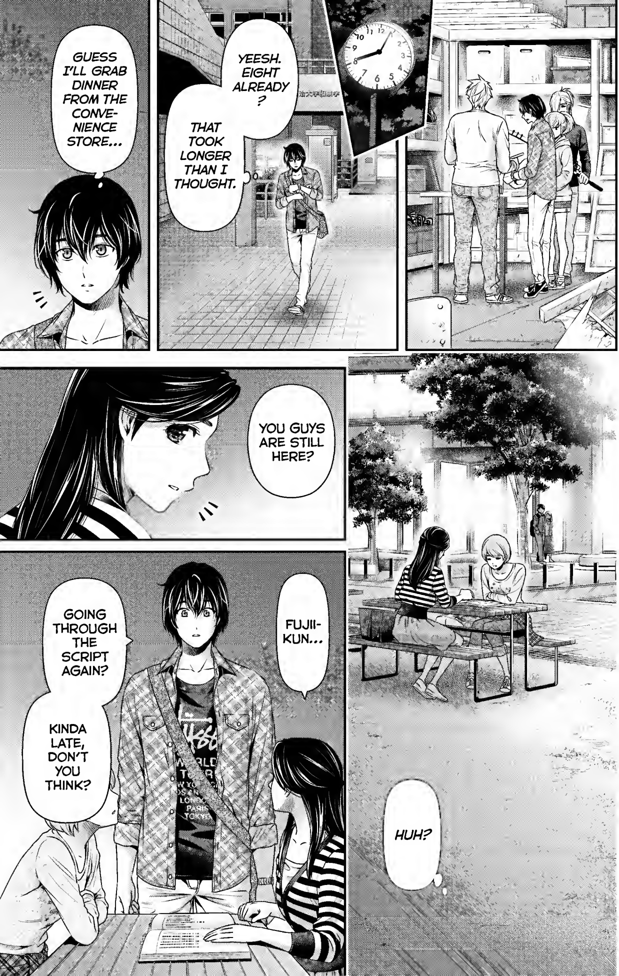

RUI...
YOU HAVEN'T BEEN SAYING THIS KINDA STUFF TO HINA-NEE, TOO, HAVE YOU?
...
NOT NECESSARILY.
WHAT WAS WITH THAT PAUSE?! AND WHY'D YOU WORD IT LIKE THAT?!
DID YOU DO SOMETHING SIMILAR TO HER?!
...
I MIGHT'VE GIVEN HER THE COLD SHOULDER A LITTLE...
HUH?!
I KNOW YOU WERE WORRIED, AND YOU CAN TAKE IT OUT ON ME ALL YOU WANT!
BUT HINA-NEE DOESN'T DESERVE THAT!
I'M SURE SHE FEELS JUST AS BAD ABOUT IT!
SHE WAS WORRIED THAT YOU MIGHT BE GETTING SCARED BY THE THUNDER, Y'KNOW!

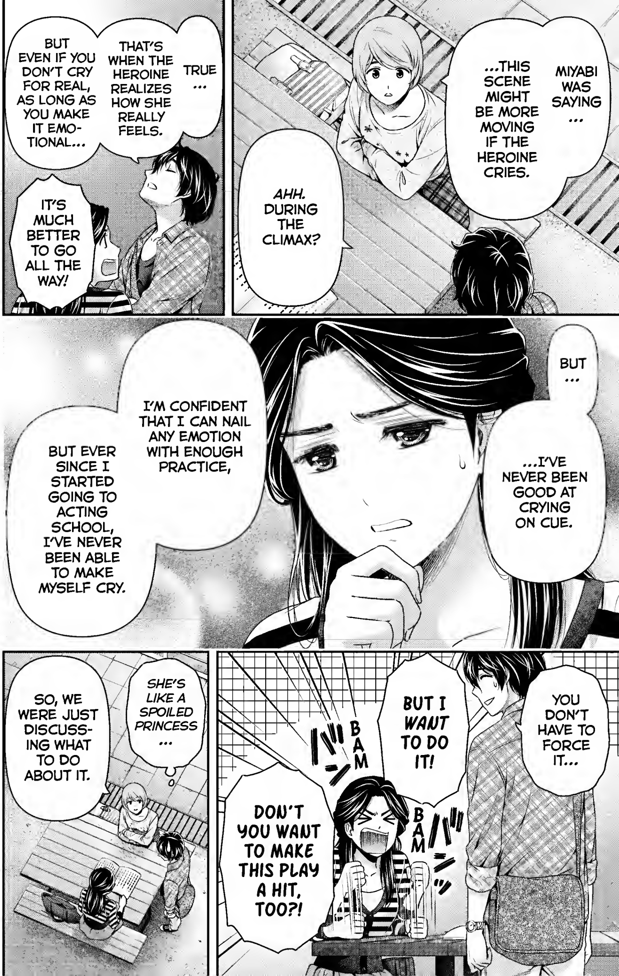

I'M HOME!
カチャ
CHACK
WOW...
DIDN'T EXPECT TO BE WELCOMED BY SOMEONE ON THEIR HANDS AND KNEES...
WEL-COME HOME, HINA-NEE.
I'VE PREPARED A NUMBER OF DISHES TO GO WITH YOUR DRINKS.
HUH?! YOU'RE SCARING ME, RUI ...
WHAT'S WRONG? DID YOU BREAK MY FAVORITE TEACUP OR SOMETHING?
I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING YOU HAVE TO APOLOGIZE FOR.
...
I WAS KIND OF COLD TO YOU ...
...AFTER WE GOT BACK FROM THE MOUNTAINS.

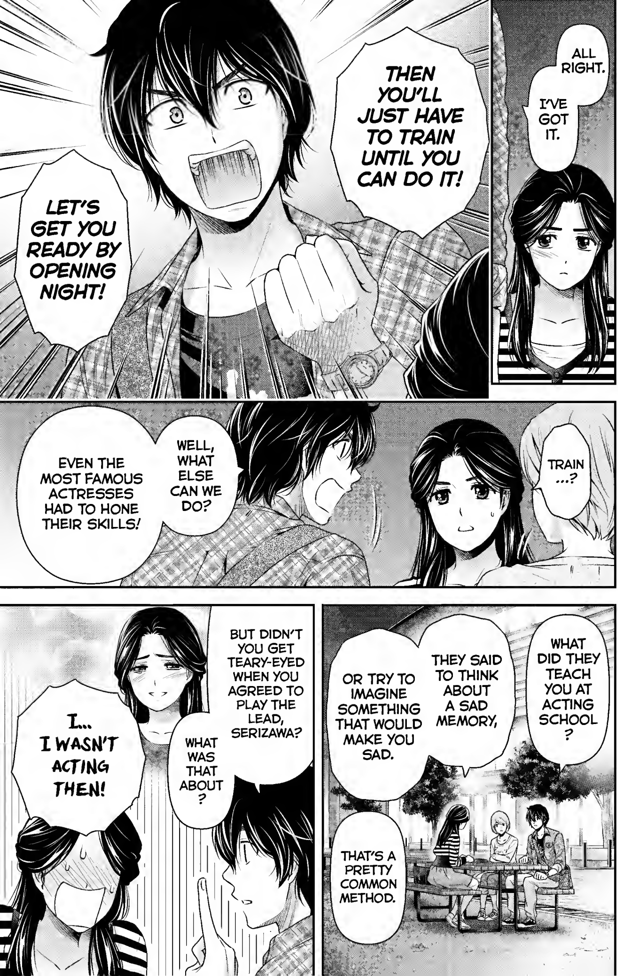

OH ...
I GOT JEALOUS THAT YOU TWO SPENT THE NIGHT TOGETHER,
THEN CAME BACK IN THE MORNING LEANING ON EACH OTHER.
I'M SORRY FOR AVOIDING YOU...
NATSUO GOT MAD AT ME WHEN I TOLD HIM.
I JUST THOUGHT I SHOULD APOLOGIZE.
OH, YOU ...
PAT ぽん
PAT ぽん
I FIGURED THAT WAS IT.
I KNEW WE PROBABLY HAD YOU WORRIED SICK THAT NIGHT.
BUT...
...YOU SHOULDN'T FIGHT WITH NATSUO-KUN OVER STUFF LIKE THIS, OKAY?

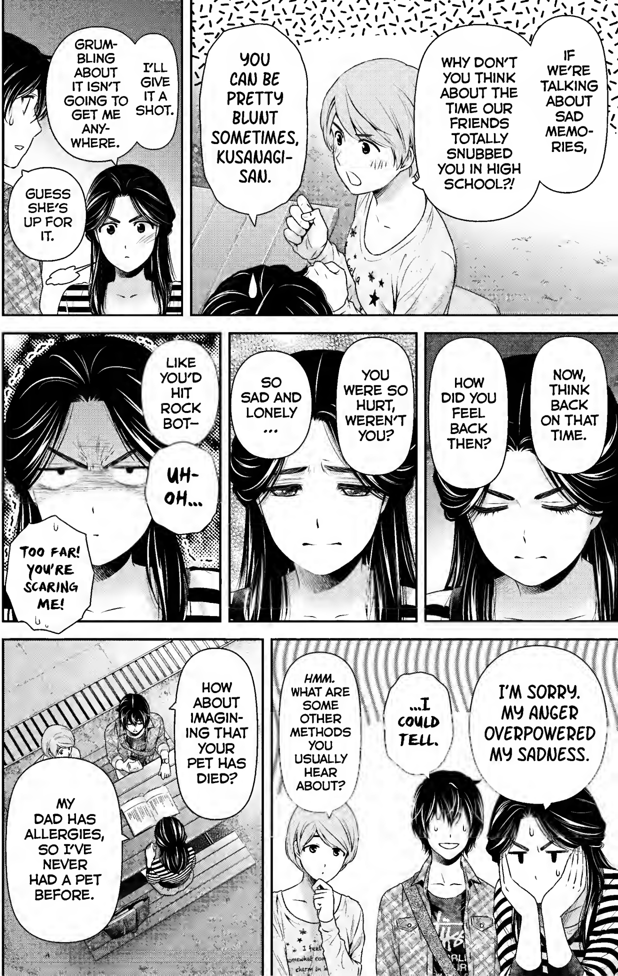

HUG
OOF.
I CAN'T BREATHE, RUI.
WHAT KIND OF SNACKS DID YOU MAKE FOR ME?
GARLIC OYSTERS, OCTOPUS CARPACCIO, AND GNOCCHI IN A CREAMY TOMATO SAUCE.
OOH! I SHOULD DO WHITE WINE TONIGHT, THEN! ♪
YOU'RE NOT LISTENING!
THIS PART WILL HAVE A BIGGER IMPACT IF IT'S A LITTLE MORE DRAMATIC!
THEATER ACTING ISN'T ANYTHING LIKE MOVIES OR TV! DO YOU GET THAT?!
OF COURSE I DO!
BUT THAT ISN'T THE RIGHT TONE FOR THIS LINE!
I DON'T WANT IT TO FEEL CONTRIVED!

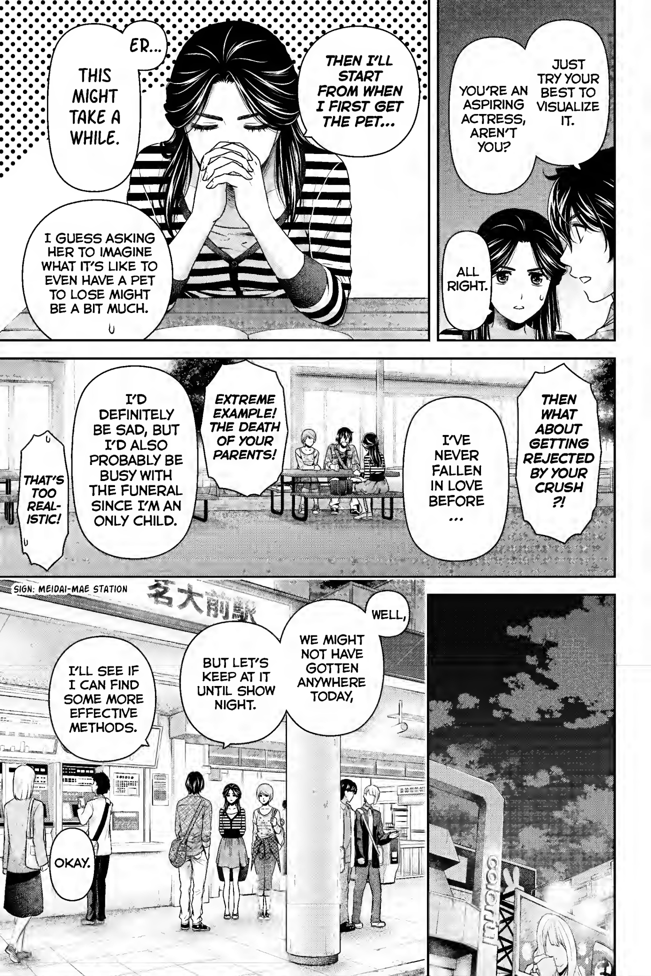

OOP.
HARD AT IT, I SEE.
NARA-SAN.
WE AREN'T MAKIN' MUCH PROGRESS SINCE OUR LEAD KEEPS BUTTING HEADS WITH THE DIRECTOR.
HA, HA. I DON'T SEE THE PROBLEM.
THESE THINGS USUALLY WORK THEMSELVES OUT IF YOU LET THEM RUN THEIR COURSE.
SERIZAWA'S CHEEKINESS IS ALMOST ADORABLE COMPARED TO YOU DURING YOUR FIRST YEAR.
SORRY 'BOUT THAT...
HEY, FUJII! DON'T FORGET WE'VE GOTTA CHECK THE PROPS AFTER THIS!
OH!
RIGHT!

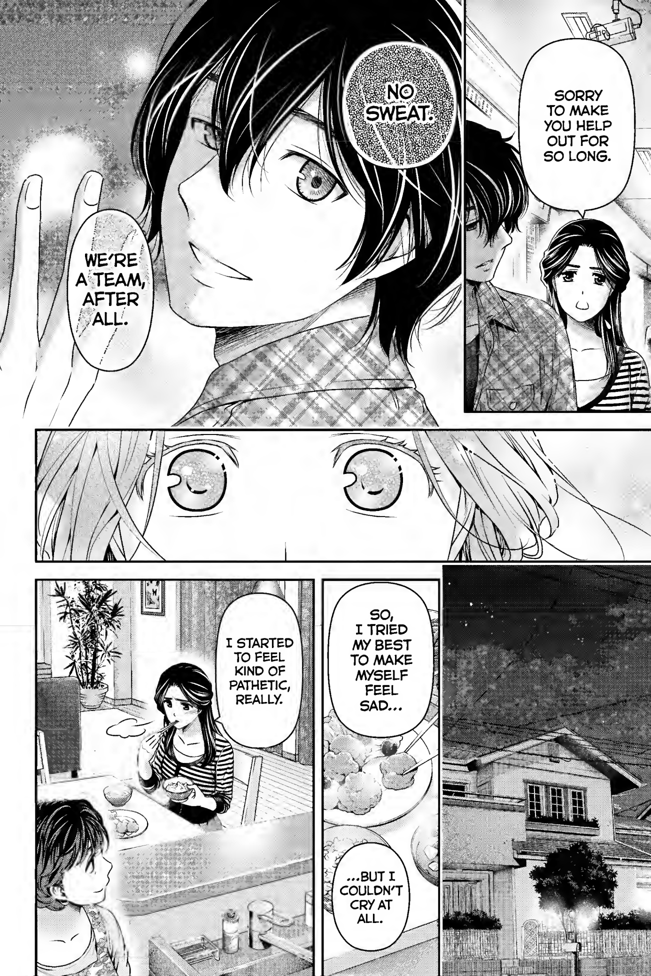

YEESH. EIGHT ALREADY?
THAT TOOK LONGER THAN I THOUGHT.
GUESS I'LL GRAB DINNER FROM THE CONVENIENCE STORE...
HUH?
YOU GUYS ARE STILL HERE?
FUJII-KUN...
GOING THROUGH THE SCRIPT AGAIN?
KINDA LATE, DON'T YOU THINK?

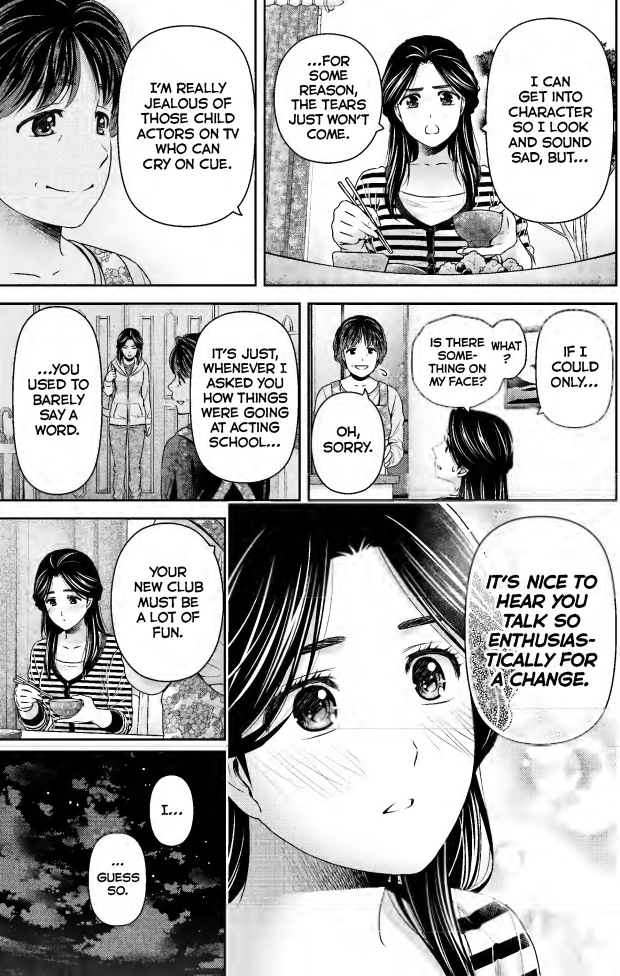

MIYABI WAS SAYING…
…THIS SCENE MIGHT BE MORE MOVING IF THE HEROINE CRIES.
AHH. DURING THE CLIMAX?
TRUE…
THAT'S WHEN THE HEROINE REALIZES HOW SHE REALLY FEELS.
BUT EVEN IF YOU DON'T CRY FOR REAL, AS LONG AS YOU MAKE IT EMOTIONAL…
IT'S MUCH BETTER TO GO ALL THE WAY!
BUT…
…I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD AT CRYING ON CUE.
I'M CONFIDENT THAT I CAN NAIL ANY EMOTION WITH ENOUGH PRACTICE,
BUT EVER SINCE I STARTED GOING TO ACTING SCHOOL, I'VE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO MAKE MYSELF CRY.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO FORCE IT…
BUT I WANT TO DO IT!
BAM
BAM
DON'T YOU WANT TO MAKE THIS PLAY A HIT, TOO?!
SHE'S LIKE A SPOILED PRINCESS…
SO, WE WERE JUST DISCUSSING WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

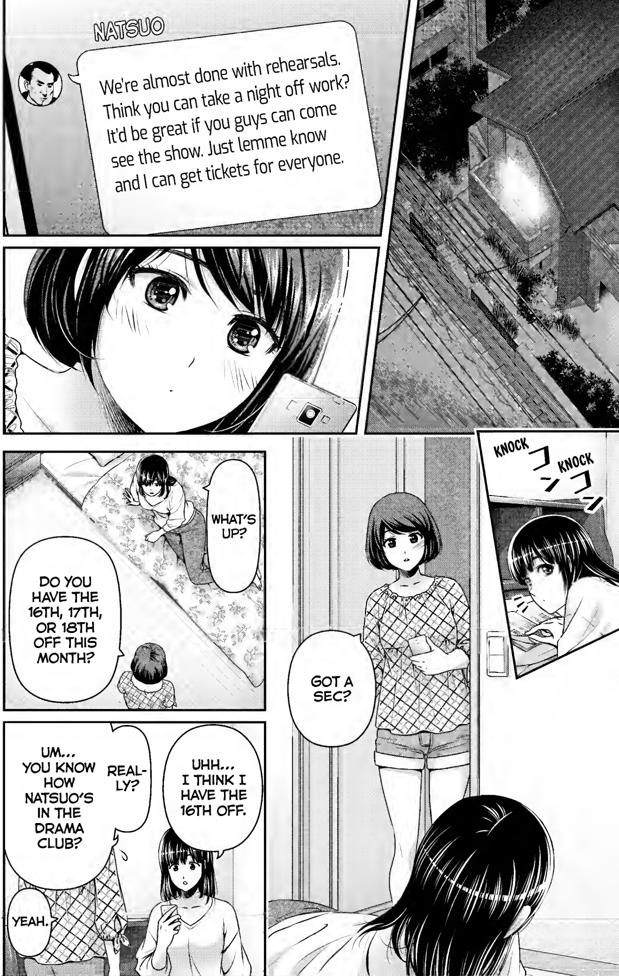

ALL RIGHT.
I'VE GOT IT.
THEN YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TRAIN UNTIL YOU CAN DO IT!
LET'S GET YOU READY BY OPENING NIGHT!
TRAIN ...?
WELL, WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?
EVEN THE MOST FAMOUS ACTRESSES HAD TO HONE THEIR SKILLS!
WHAT DID THEY TEACH YOU AT ACTING SCHOOL?
THEY SAID TO THINK ABOUT A SAD MEMORY,
OR TRY TO IMAGINE SOMETHING THAT WOULD MAKE YOU SAD.
THAT'S A PRETTY COMMON METHOD.
BUT DIDN'T YOU GET TEARY-EYED WHEN YOU AGREED TO PLAY THE LEAD, SERIZAWA?
WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?
I... I WASN'T ACTING THEN!


IF WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SAD MEMORIES,
WHY DON'T YOU THINK ABOUT THE TIME OUR FRIENDS TOTALLY SNUBBED YOU IN HIGH SCHOOL?!
YOU CAN BE PRETTY BLUNT SOMETIMES, KUSANAGI-SAN.
I'LL GIVE IT A SHOT.
GRUMBLING ABOUT IT ISN'T GOING TO GET ME ANYWHERE.
GUESS SHE'S UP FOR IT.
NOW, THINK BACK ON THAT TIME.
HOW DID YOU FEEL BACK THEN?
YOU WERE SO HURT, WEREN'T YOU?
SO SAD AND LONELY ...
LIKE YOU'D HIT ROCK BOT–
UH-OH...
TOO FAR! YOU'RE SCARING ME!
I'M SORRY. MY ANGER OVERPOWERED MY SADNESS.
...I COULD TELL.
HMM. WHAT ARE SOME OTHER METHODS YOU USUALLY HEAR ABOUT?
HOW ABOUT IMAGINING THAT YOUR PET HAS DIED?
MY DAD HAS ALLERGIES, SO I'VE NEVER HAD A PET BEFORE.


JUST TRY YOUR BEST TO VISUALIZE IT.
YOU'RE AN ASPIRING ACTRESS, AREN'T YOU?
ALL RIGHT.
THEN I'LL START FROM WHEN I FIRST GET THE PET...
ER...
THIS MIGHT TAKE A WHILE.
I GUESS ASKING HER TO IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO EVEN HAVE A PET TO LOSE MIGHT BE A BIT MUCH.
THEN WHAT ABOUT GETTING REJECTED BY YOUR CRUSH?!
I'VE NEVER FALLEN IN LOVE BEFORE...
EXTREME EXAMPLE! THE DEATH OF YOUR PARENTS!
I'D DEFINITELY BE SAD, BUT I'D ALSO PROBABLY BE BUSY WITH THE FUNERAL SINCE I'M AN ONLY CHILD.
THAT'S TOO REAL-ISTIC!
名大前駅
SIGN: MEIDAI-MAE STATION
WELL,
WE MIGHT NOT HAVE GOTTEN ANYWHERE TODAY,
BUT LET'S KEEP AT IT UNTIL SHOW NIGHT.
I'LL SEE IF I CAN FIND SOME MORE EFFECTIVE METHODS.
OKAY.
colorful


SORRY TO MAKE YOU HELP OUT FOR SO LONG.
NO SWEAT.
WE'RE A TEAM, AFTER ALL.
SO, I TRIED MY BEST TO MAKE MYSELF FEEL SAD...
...BUT I COULDN'T CRY AT ALL.
I STARTED TO FEEL KIND OF PATHETIC, REALLY.

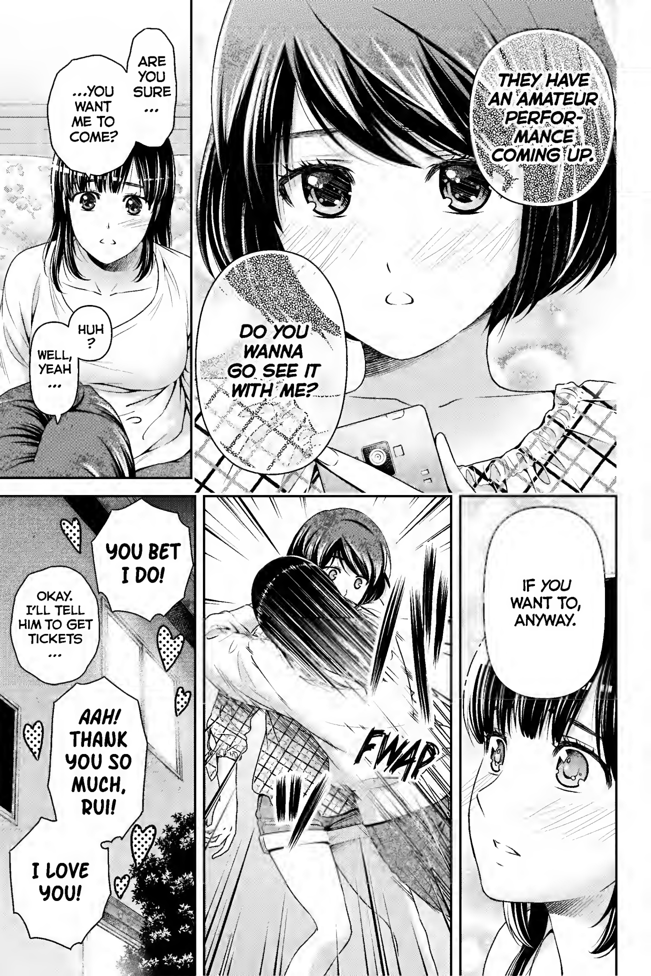

I CAN GET INTO CHARACTER SO I LOOK AND SOUND SAD, BUT...
...FOR SOME REASON, THE TEARS JUST WON'T COME.
I'M REALLY JEALOUS OF THOSE CHILD ACTORS ON TV WHO CAN CRY ON CUE.
IF I COULD ONLY...
WHAT?
IS THERE SOMETHING ON MY FACE?
OH, SORRY.
IT'S JUST, WHENEVER I ASKED YOU HOW THINGS WERE GOING AT ACTING SCHOOL...
...YOU USED TO BARELY SAY A WORD.
IT'S NICE TO HEAR YOU TALK SO ENTHUSIASTICALLY FOR A CHANGE.
YOUR NEW CLUB MUST BE A LOT OF FUN.
I...
...GUESS SO.

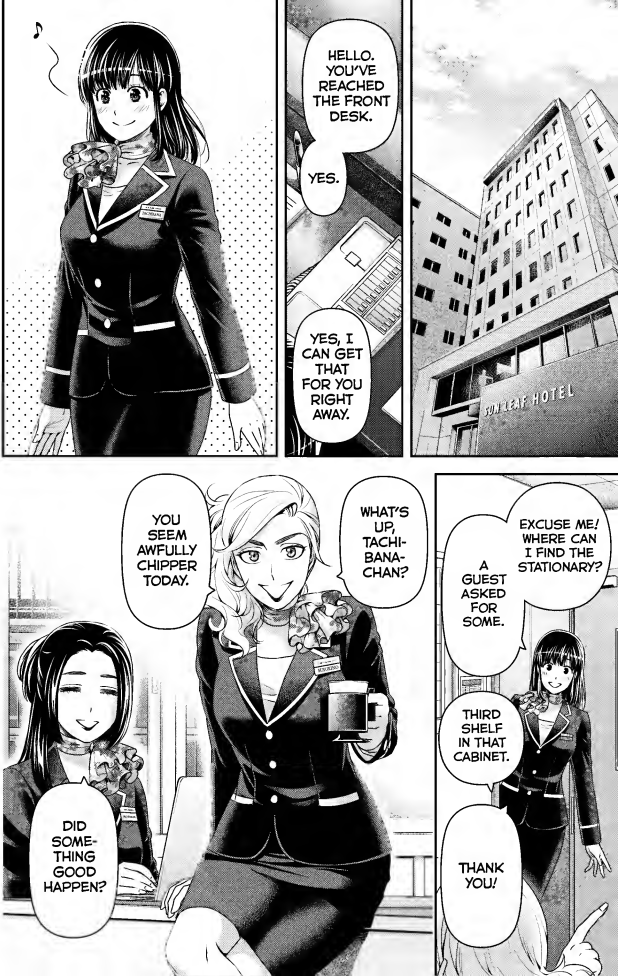


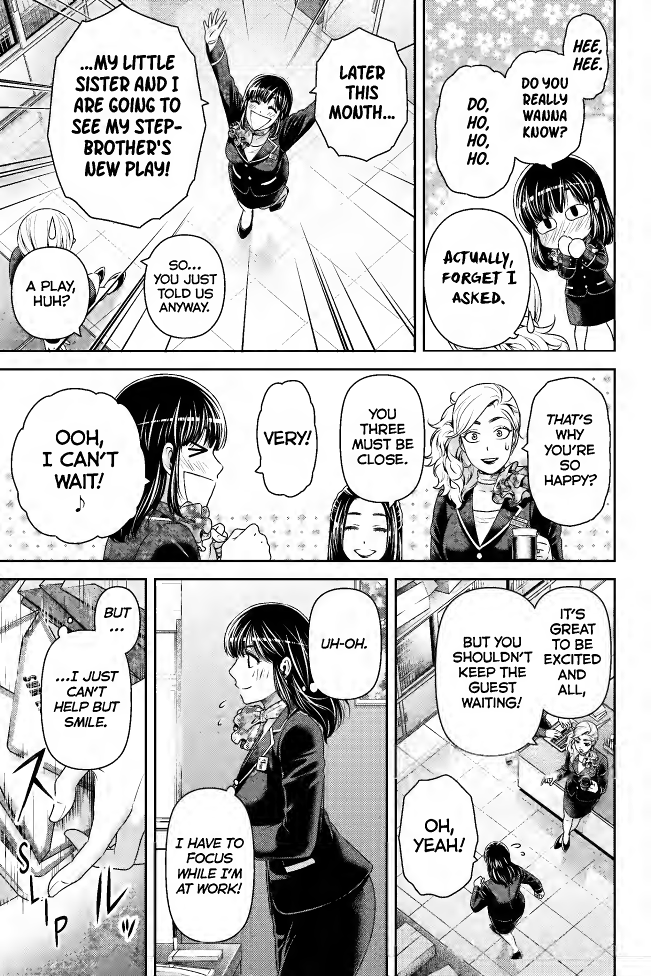
NATSUO

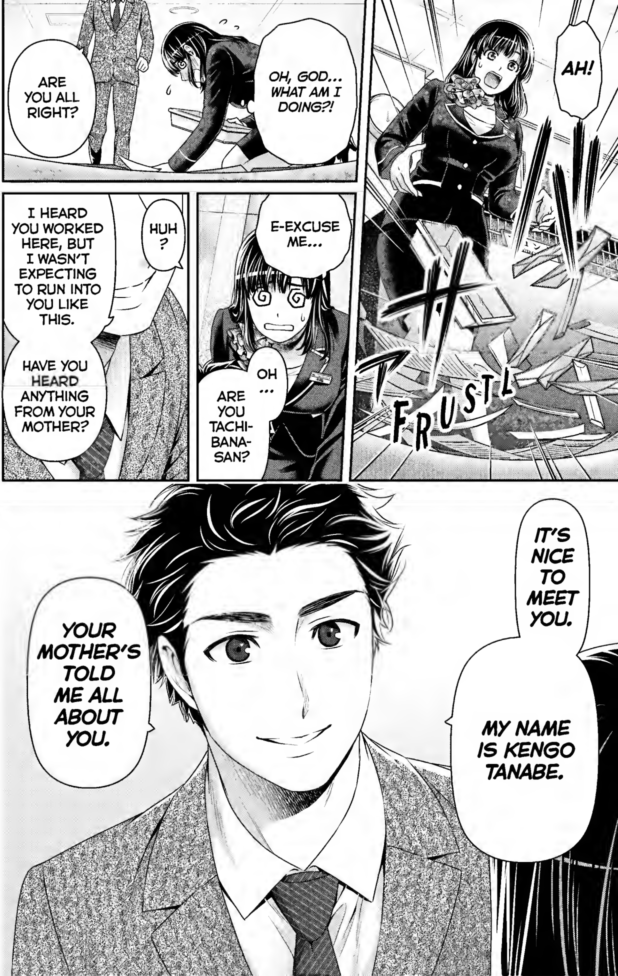
We're almost done with rehearsals. Think you can take a night off work? It'd be great if you guys can come see the show. Just lemme know and I can get tickets for everyone.

KNOCK
コン
KNOCK
コン
GOT A SEC?
WHAT'S UP?
DO YOU HAVE THE 16TH, 17TH, OR 18TH OFF THIS MONTH?
UHH... I THINK I HAVE THE 16TH OFF.
REAL-LY?
UM... YOU KNOW HOW NATSUO'S IN THE DRAMA CLUB?
YEAH.

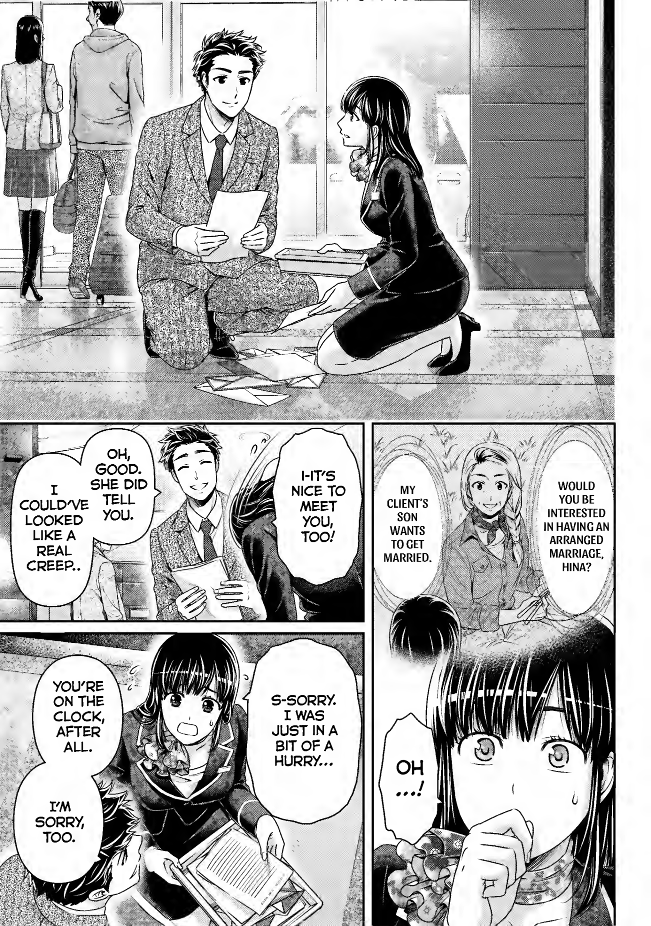

THEY HAVE AN AMATEUR PERFORMANCE COMING UP.
DO YOU WANNA GO SEE IT WITH ME?
ARE YOU SURE ...
...YOU WANT ME TO COME?
HUH?
WELL, YEAH ...
IF *YOU* WANT TO, ANYWAY.
FWAP
YOU BET I DO!
OKAY. I'LL TELL HIM TO GET TICKETS ...
AAH! THANK YOU SO MUCH, RUI!
I LOVE YOU!

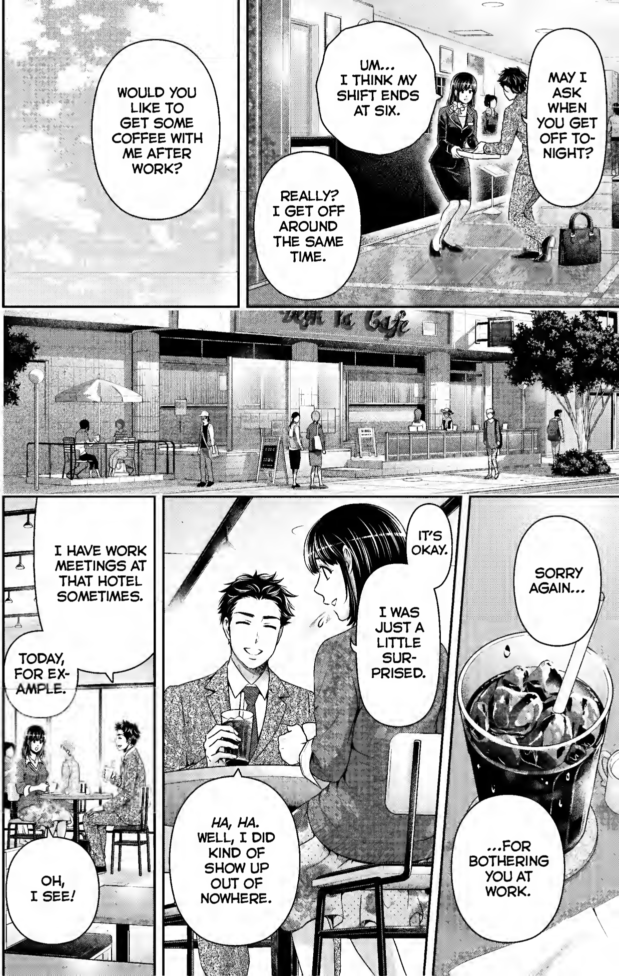

SUN LEAF HOTEL
HELLO. YOU'VE REACHED THE FRONT DESK.
YES.
YES, I CAN GET THAT FOR YOU RIGHT AWAY.
♪
TACHIBANA
EXCUSE ME! WHERE CAN I FIND THE STATIONARY?
A GUEST ASKED FOR SOME.
THIRD SHELF IN THAT CABINET.
THANK YOU!
WHAT'S UP, TACHIBANA-CHAN?
YOU SEEM AWFULLY CHIPPER TODAY.
SUSUKINO
DID SOMETHING GOOD HAPPEN?

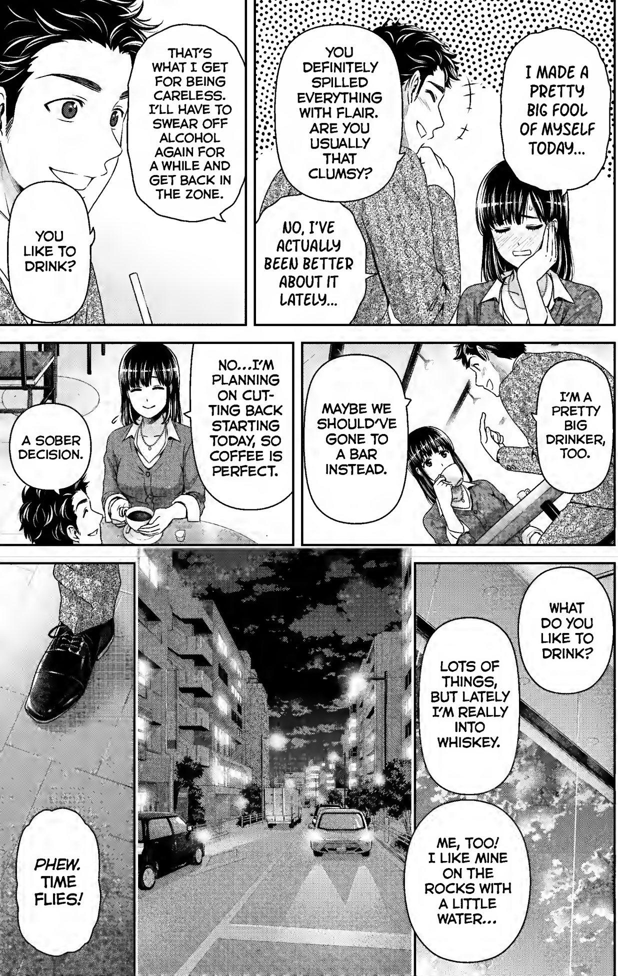

HEE, HEE.
DO YOU REALLY WANNA KNOW?
DO, HO, HO, HO.
ACTUALLY, FORGET I ASKED.
LATER THIS MONTH...
...MY LITTLE SISTER AND I ARE GOING TO SEE MY STEP-BROTHER'S NEW PLAY!
SO... YOU JUST TOLD US ANYWAY.
A PLAY, HUH?
THAT'S WHY YOU'RE SO HAPPY?
YOU THREE MUST BE CLOSE.
VERY!
OOH, I CAN'T WAIT! ♪
IT'S GREAT TO BE EXCITED AND ALL,
BUT YOU SHOULDN'T KEEP THE GUEST WAITING!
OH, YEAH!
UH-OH.
I HAVE TO FOCUS WHILE I'M AT WORK!
BUT...
...I JUST CAN'T HELP BUT SMILE.
SLIP

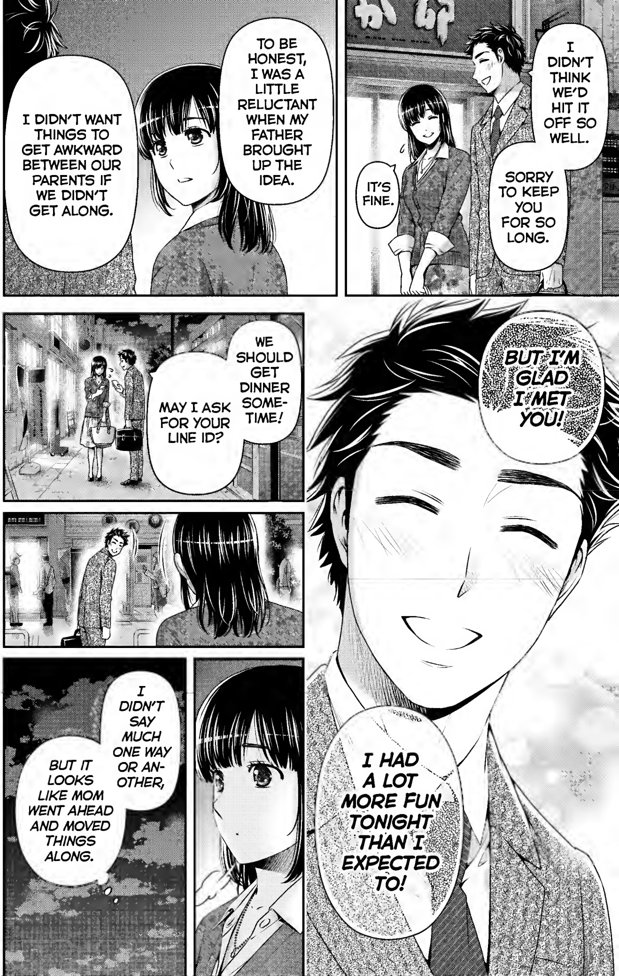

AH!
FRUSTL
OH, GOD... WHAT AM I DOING?!
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
E-EXCUSE ME...
OH... ARE YOU TACHIBANA-SAN?
HUH?
I HEARD YOU WORKED HERE, BUT I WASN'T EXPECTING TO RUN INTO YOU LIKE THIS.
HAVE YOU HEARD ANYTHING FROM YOUR MOTHER?
IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU.
MY NAME IS KENGO TANABE.
YOUR MOTHER'S TOLD ME ALL ABOUT YOU.

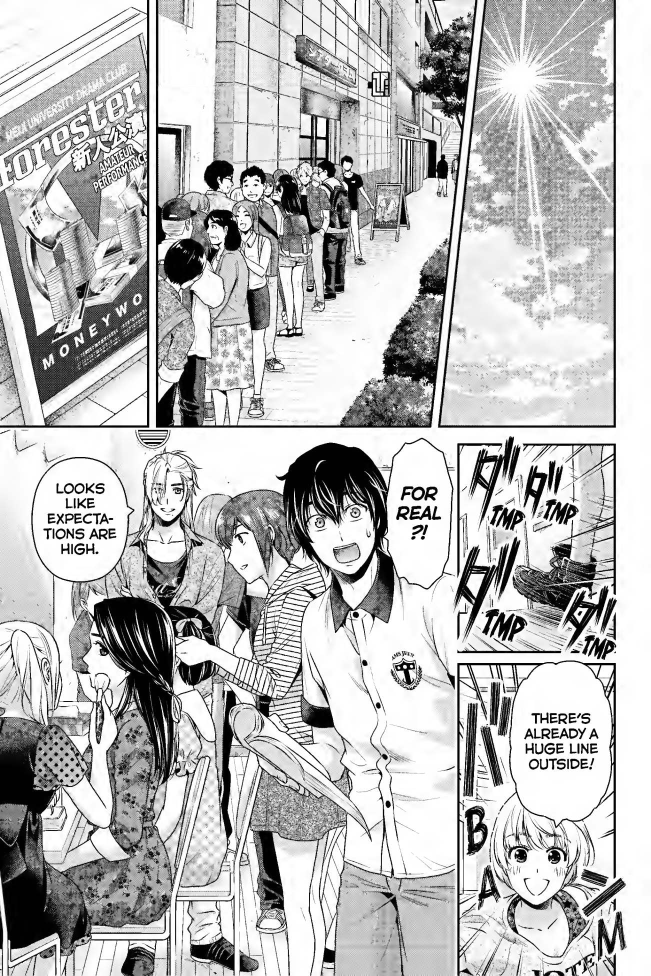
# CHAPTER 157: FEELINGS SET IN MOTION

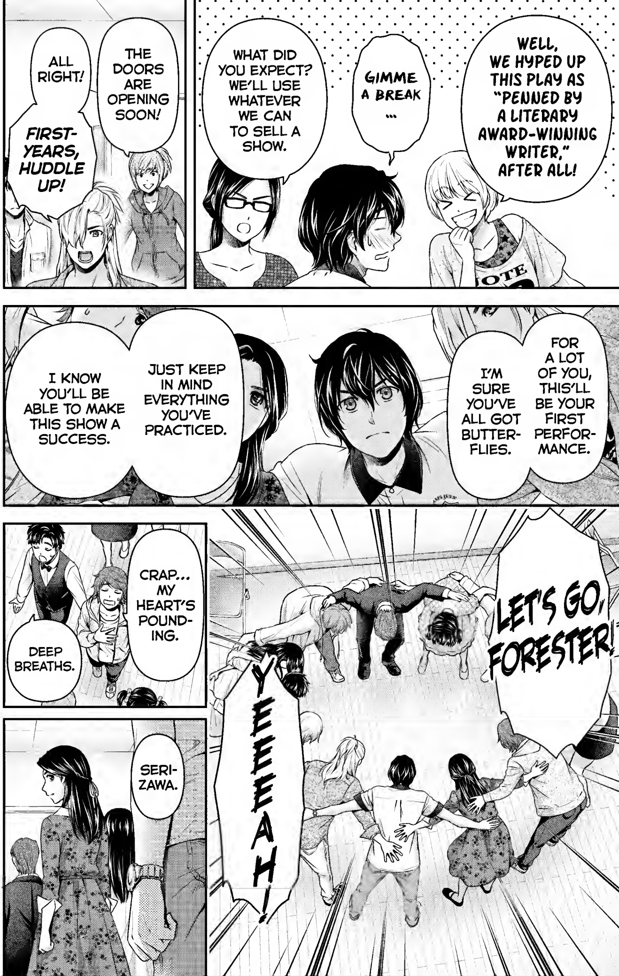

WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN HAVING AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE, HINA?
MY CLIENT'S SON WANTS TO GET MARRIED.
OH ...!
I-IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU, TOO!
OH, GOOD. SHE DID TELL YOU.
I COULD'VE LOOKED LIKE A REAL CREEP..
S-SORRY. I WAS JUST IN A BIT OF A HURRY...
YOU'RE ON THE CLOCK, AFTER ALL.
I'M SORRY, TOO.

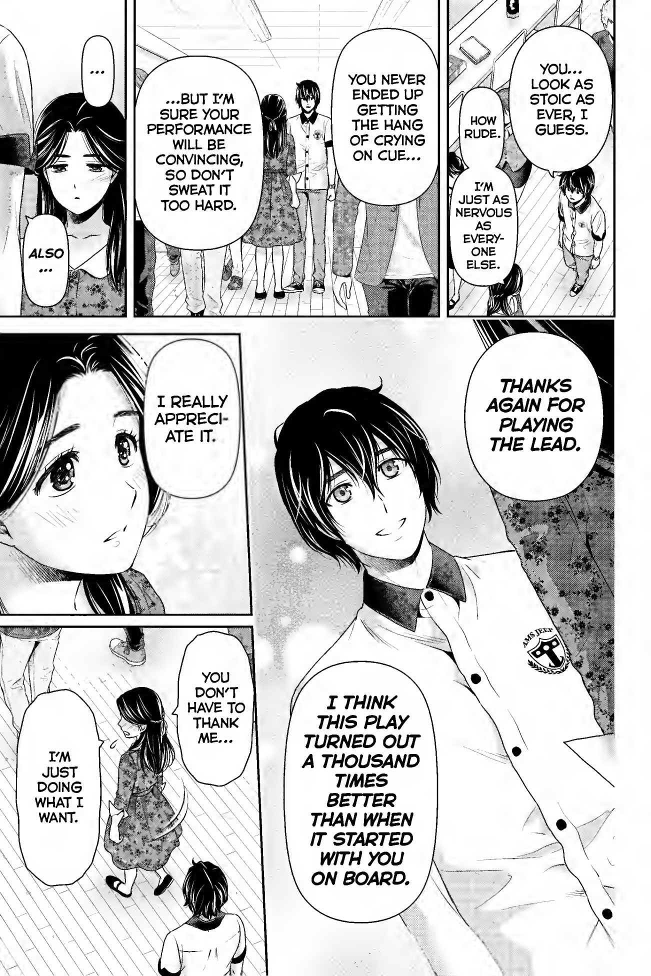

MAY I ASK WHEN YOU GET OFF TONIGHT?
UM... I THINK MY SHIFT ENDS AT SIX.
REALLY? I GET OFF AROUND THE SAME TIME.
WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET SOME COFFEE WITH ME AFTER WORK?
SORRY AGAIN...
...FOR BOTHERING YOU AT WORK.
IT'S OKAY.
I WAS JUST A LITTLE SURPRISED.
*HA, HA.* WELL, I DID KIND OF SHOW UP OUT OF NOWHERE.
I HAVE WORK MEETINGS AT THAT HOTEL SOMETIMES.
TODAY, FOR EXAMPLE.
OH, I SEE!

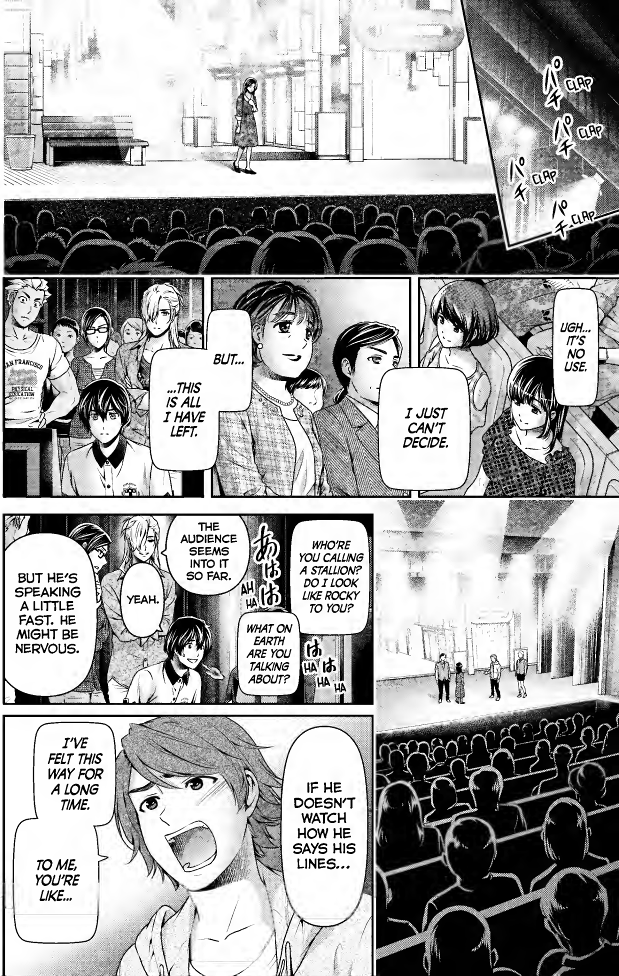

I MADE A PRETTY BIG FOOL OF MYSELF TODAY...
YOU DEFINITELY SPILLED EVERYTHING WITH FLAIR. ARE YOU USUALLY THAT CLUMSY?
NO, I'VE ACTUALLY BEEN BETTER ABOUT IT LATELY...
THAT'S WHAT I GET FOR BEING CARELESS. I'LL HAVE TO SWEAR OFF ALCOHOL AGAIN FOR A WHILE AND GET BACK IN THE ZONE.
YOU LIKE TO DRINK?
I'M A PRETTY BIG DRINKER, TOO.
MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE GONE TO A BAR INSTEAD.
NO...I'M PLANNING ON CUTTING BACK STARTING TODAY, SO COFFEE IS PERFECT.
A SOBER DECISION.
WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DRINK?
LOTS OF THINGS, BUT LATELY I'M REALLY INTO WHISKEY.
ME, TOO! I LIKE MINE ON THE ROCKS WITH A LITTLE WATER...
PHEW. TIME FLIES!

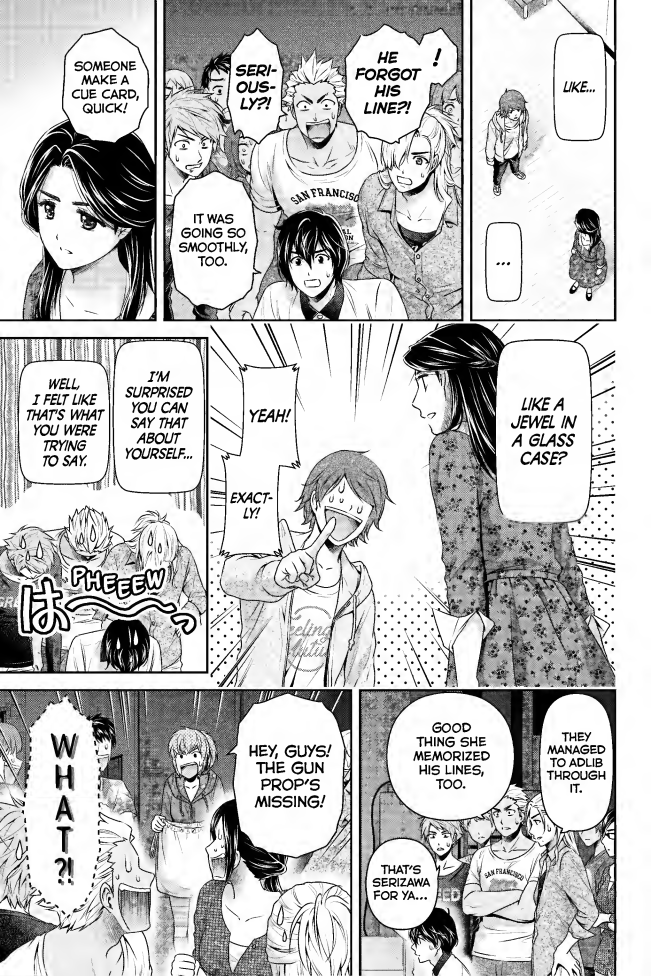

I DIDN'T THINK WE'D HIT IT OFF SO WELL.
SORRY TO KEEP YOU FOR SO LONG.
IT'S FINE.
TO BE HONEST, I WAS A LITTLE RELUCTANT WHEN MY FATHER BROUGHT UP THE IDEA.
I DIDN'T WANT THINGS TO GET AWKWARD BETWEEN OUR PARENTS IF WE DIDN'T GET ALONG.
BUT I'M GLAD I MET YOU!
I HAD A LOT MORE FUN TONIGHT THAN I EXPECTED TO!
WE SHOULD GET DINNER SOMETIME!
MAY I ASK FOR YOUR LINE ID?
I DIDN'T SAY MUCH ONE WAY OR ANOTHER,
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE MOM WENT AHEAD AND MOVED THINGS ALONG.

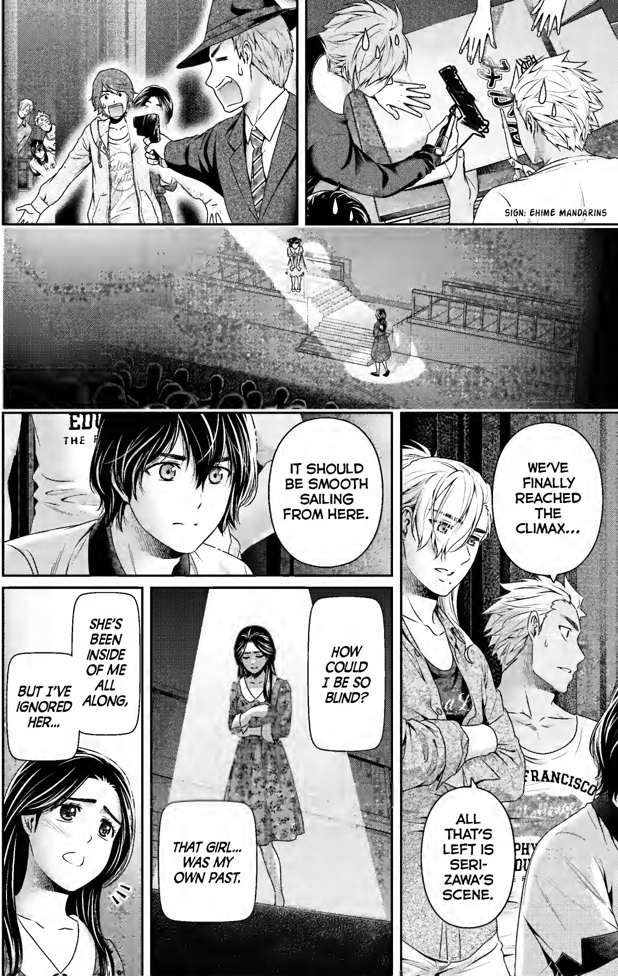

NEW UNIVERSITY DRAMA CLUB
Forester 新人公演
AMATEUR PERFORMANCE
MONEYWO
TMP TMP TMP TMP TMP
THERE'S ALREADY A HUGE LINE OUTSIDE!
BAM
FOR REAL?!
LOOKS LIKE EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH.

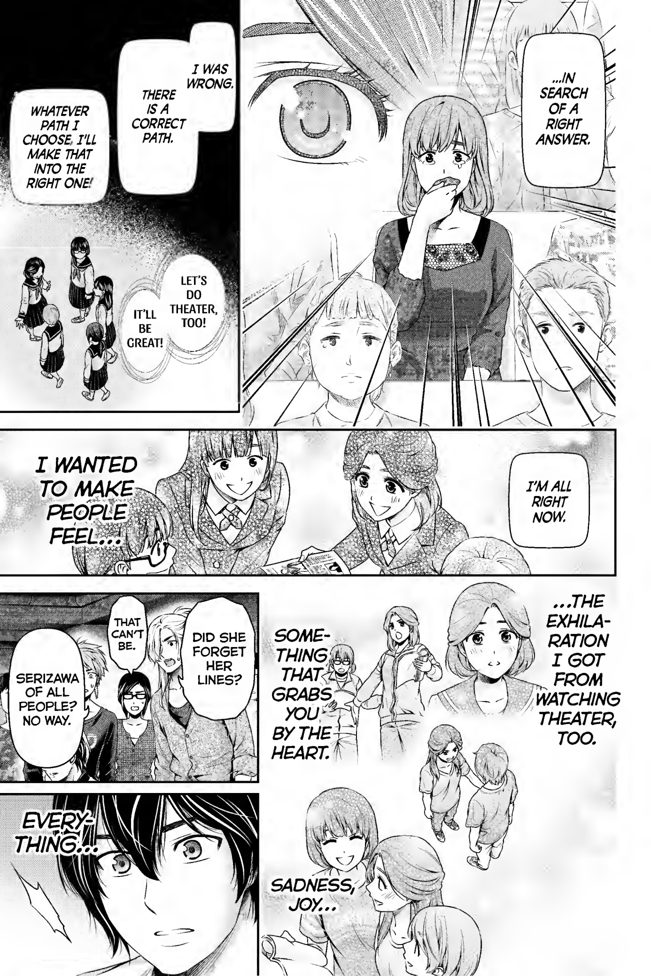

WELL, WE HYPED UP THIS PLAY AS "PENNED BY A LITERARY AWARD-WINNING WRITER," AFTER ALL!
GIMME A BREAK ...
WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? WE'LL USE WHATEVER WE CAN TO SELL A SHOW.
THE DOORS ARE OPENING SOON!
ALL RIGHT!
FIRST-YEARS, HUDDLE UP!
FOR A LOT OF YOU, THIS'LL BE YOUR FIRST PERFORMANCE.
I'M SURE YOU'VE ALL GOT BUTTERFLIES.
JUST KEEP IN MIND EVERYTHING YOU'VE PRACTICED.
I KNOW YOU'LL BE ABLE TO MAKE THIS SHOW A SUCCESS.
LET'S GO, FORESTER!
YEEEEEAH!
CRAP... MY HEART'S POUNDING.
DEEP BREATHS.
SERIZAWA.

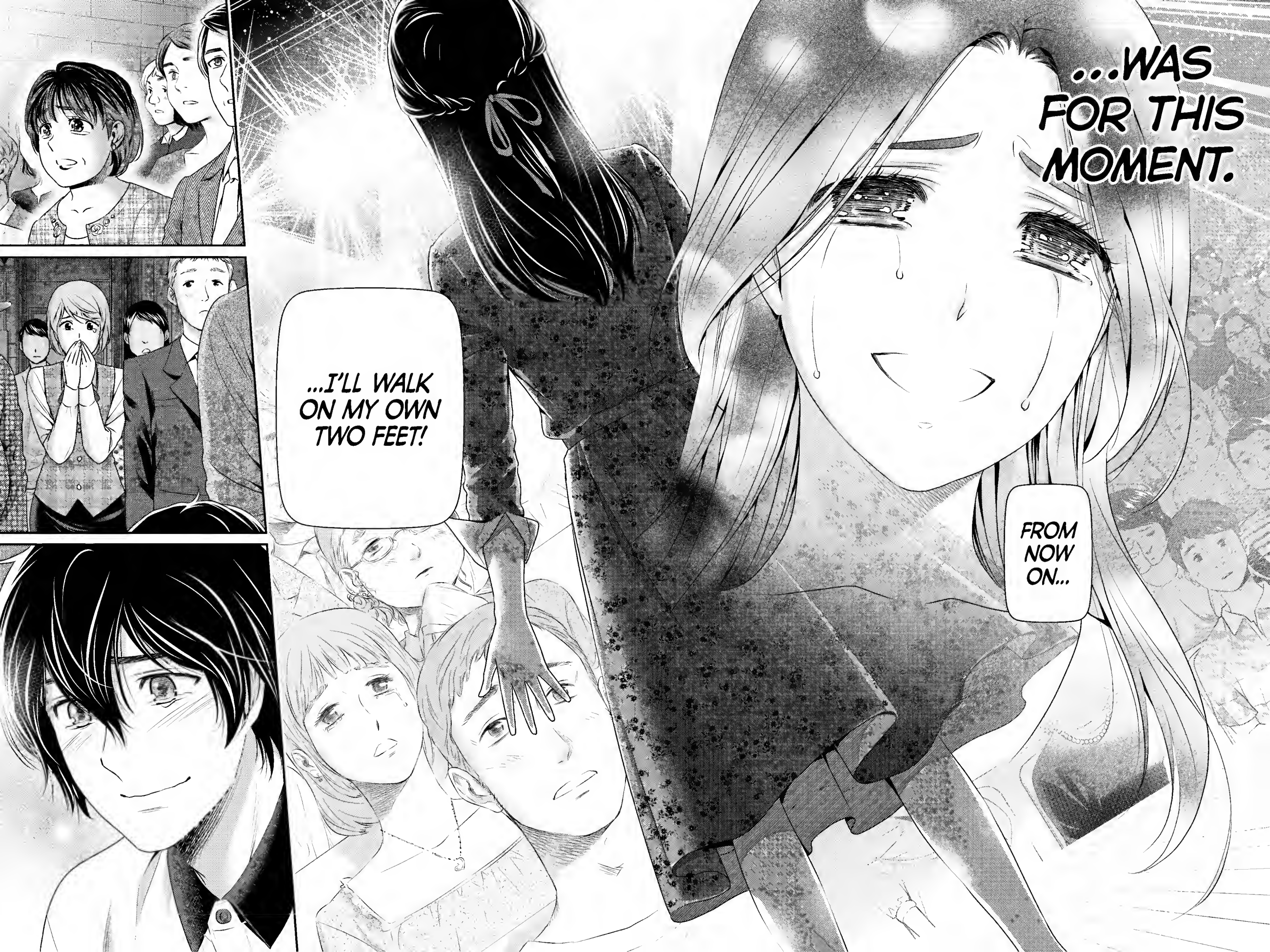

YOU... LOOK AS STOIC AS EVER, I GUESS.
HOW RUDE.
I'M JUST AS NERVOUS AS EVERYONE ELSE.
YOU NEVER ENDED UP GETTING THE HANG OF CRYING ON CUE...
...BUT I'M SURE YOUR PERFORMANCE WILL BE CONVINCING, SO DON'T SWEAT IT TOO HARD.
...
ALSO...
THANKS AGAIN FOR PLAYING THE LEAD.
I REALLY APPRECIATE IT.
I THINK THIS PLAY TURNED OUT A THOUSAND TIMES BETTER THAN WHEN IT STARTED WITH YOU ON BOARD.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO THANK ME...
I'M JUST DOING WHAT I WANT.

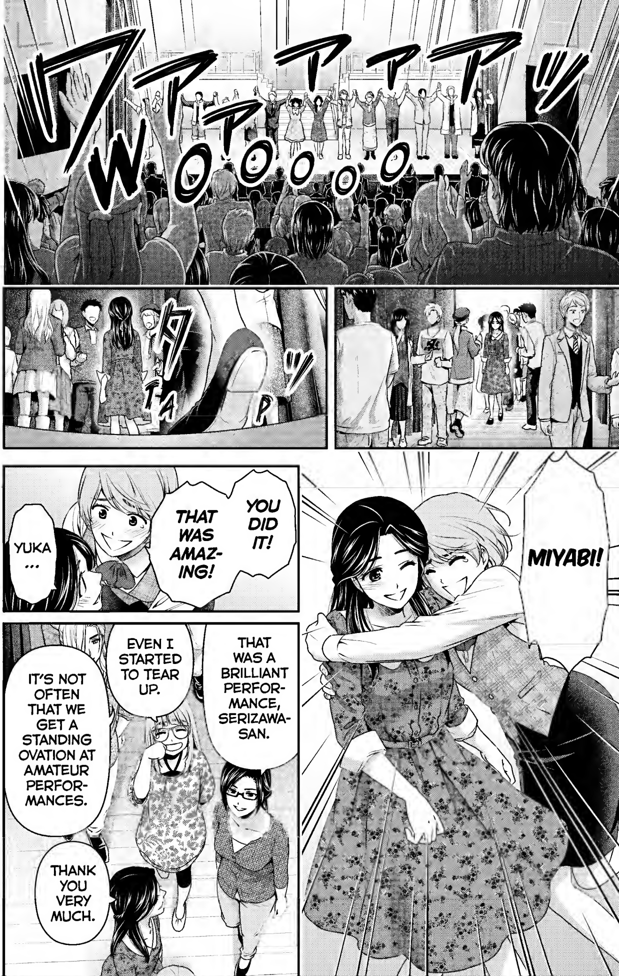

パチ CLAP
パチ CLAP
パチ CLAP
パチ CLAP
UGH... IT'S NO USE.
I JUST CAN'T DECIDE.
BUT...
...THIS IS ALL I HAVE LEFT.
WHO'RE YOU CALLING A STALLION? DO I LOOK LIKE ROCKY TO YOU?
あはは AH HA
WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
ははは HA HA HA
THE AUDIENCE SEEMS INTO IT SO FAR.
YEAH.
BUT HE'S SPEAKING A LITTLE FAST. HE MIGHT BE NERVOUS.
IF HE DOESN'T WATCH HOW HE SAYS HIS LINES...
I'VE FELT THIS WAY FOR A LONG TIME.
TO ME, YOU'RE LIKE...

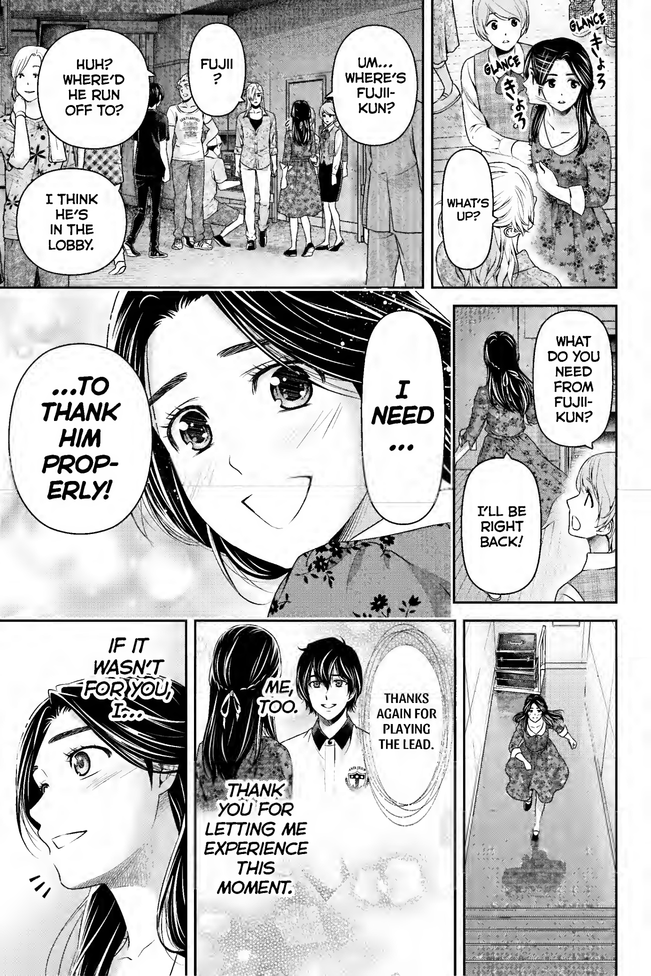

LIKE...
...
HE FORGOT HIS LINE?!
SERIOUSLY?!
IT WAS GOING SO SMOOTHLY, TOO.
SOMEONE MAKE A CUE CARD, QUICK!
LIKE A JEWEL IN A GLASS CASE?
YEAH!
EXACTLY!
I'M SURPRISED YOU CAN SAY THAT ABOUT YOURSELF...
WELL, I FELT LIKE THAT'S WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO SAY.
は〜〜〜っ PHEEEW
THEY MANAGED TO ADLIB THROUGH IT.
GOOD THING SHE MEMORIZED HIS LINES, TOO.
THAT'S SERIZAWA FOR YA...
HEY, GUYS! THE GUN PROP'S MISSING!
WHAT?!


SIGN: EHIME MANDARINS
WE'VE FINALLY REACHED THE CLIMAX...
IT SHOULD BE SMOOTH SAILING FROM HERE.
ALL THAT'S LEFT IS SERIZAWA'S SCENE.
HOW COULD I BE SO BLIND?
THAT GIRL... WAS MY OWN PAST.
SHE'S BEEN INSIDE OF ME ALL ALONG,
BUT I'VE IGNORED HER...

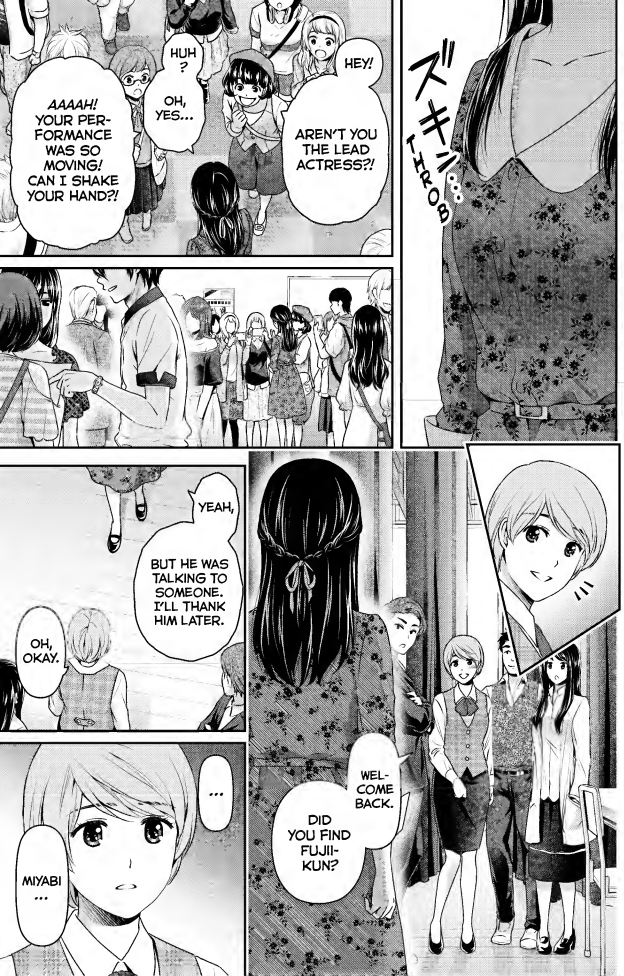

...IN SEARCH OF A RIGHT ANSWER.
I WAS WRONG.
THERE IS A CORRECT PATH.
WHATEVER PATH I CHOOSE, I'LL MAKE THAT INTO THE RIGHT ONE!
LET'S DO THEATER, TOO!
IT'LL BE GREAT!
I'M ALL RIGHT NOW.
I WANTED TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL...
...THE EXHILARATION I GOT FROM WATCHING THEATER, TOO.
SOMETHING THAT GRABS YOU BY THE HEART.
DID SHE FORGET HER LINES?
THAT CAN'T BE.
SERIZAWA OF ALL PEOPLE? NO WAY.
SADNESS, JOY...
EVERYTHING...

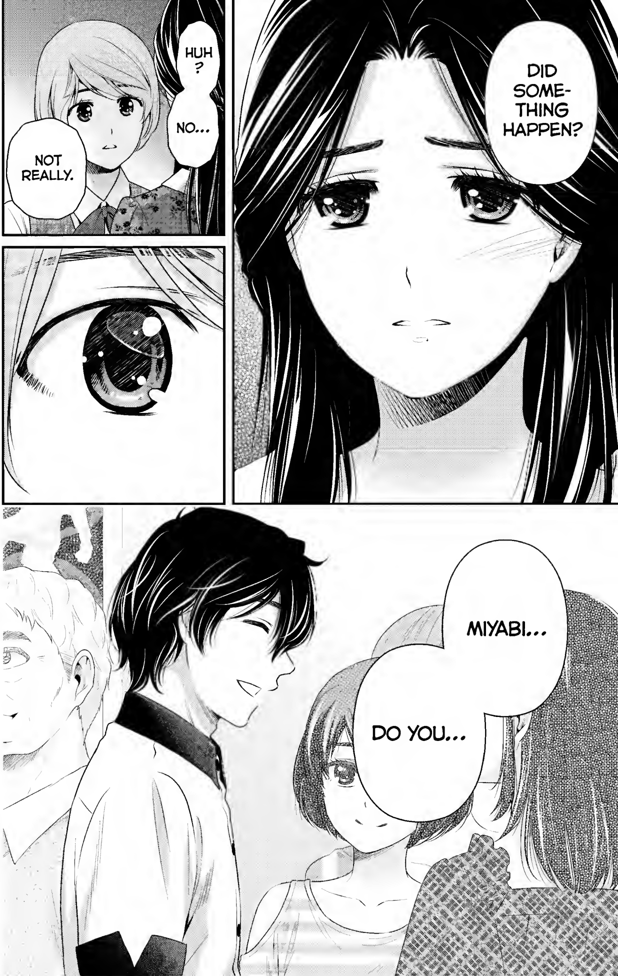

...WAS FOR THIS MOMENT.
FROM NOW ON...
...I'LL WALK ON MY OWN TWO FEET!


ワァアアアッ
WOOOOO
タッ
TA P
MIYABI!
YOU DID IT!
THAT WAS AMAZING!
YUKA…
THAT WAS A BRILLIANT PERFORMANCE, SERIZAWA-SAN.
EVEN I STARTED TO TEAR UP.
IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT WE GET A STANDING OVATION AT AMATEUR PERFORMANCES.
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

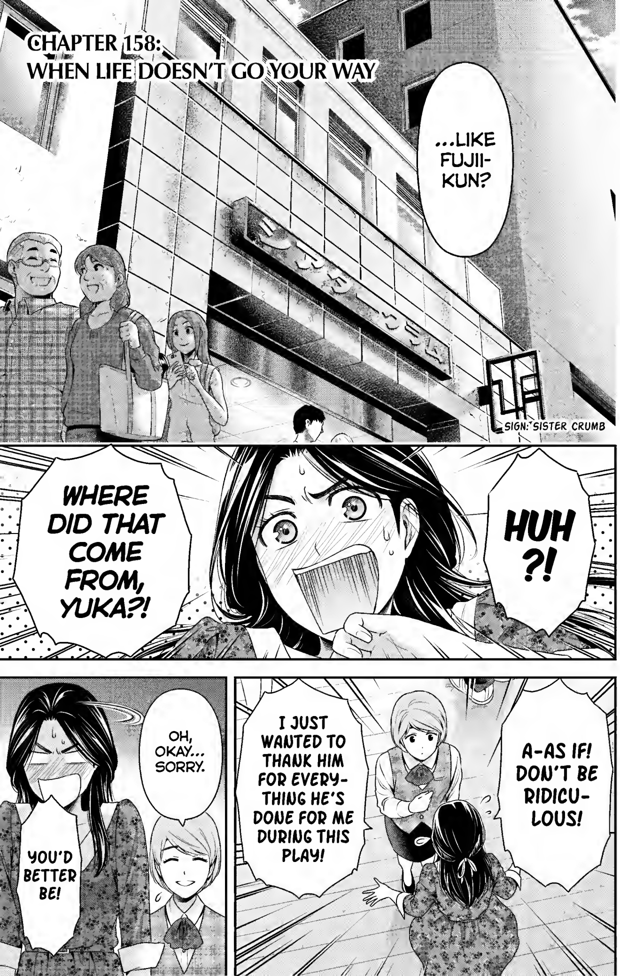

GLANCE きょろ
GLANCE きょろ
WHAT'S UP?
UM... WHERE'S FUJII-KUN?
FUJII?
HUH? WHERE'D HE RUN OFF TO?
I THINK HE'S IN THE LOBBY.
WHAT DO YOU NEED FROM FUJII-KUN?
I'LL BE RIGHT BACK!
I NEED...
...TO THANK HIM PROPERLY!
THANKS AGAIN FOR PLAYING THE LEAD.
ME, TOO.
THANK YOU FOR LETTING ME EXPERIENCE THIS MOMENT.
IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU, I...

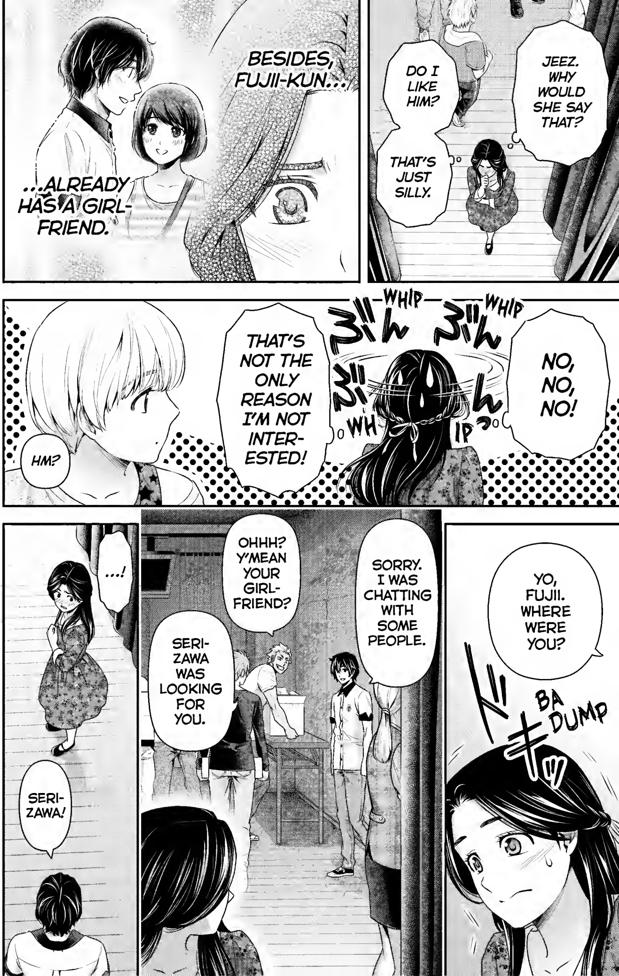
THE SOUTH FACE
Forester

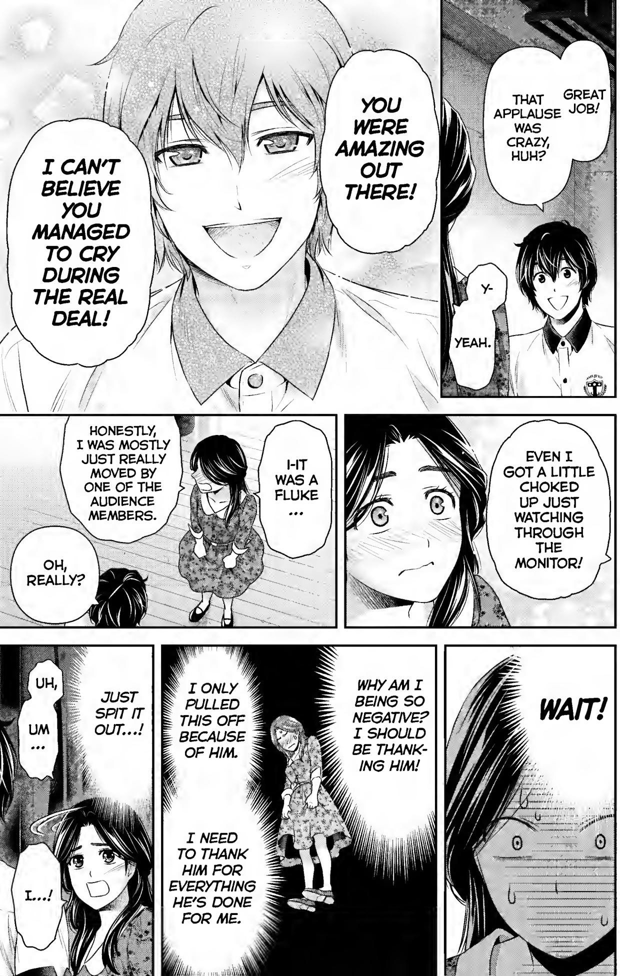

ズキン…
THROB
HEY!
AREN'T YOU THE LEAD ACTRESS?!
HUH? OH, YES...
*AAAAH!* YOUR PERFORMANCE WAS SO *MOVING!* CAN I SHAKE YOUR HAND?!
WELCOME BACK.
DID YOU FIND FUJII-KUN?
YEAH,
BUT HE WAS TALKING TO SOMEONE. I'LL THANK HIM LATER.
OH, OKAY.
...
MIYABI...

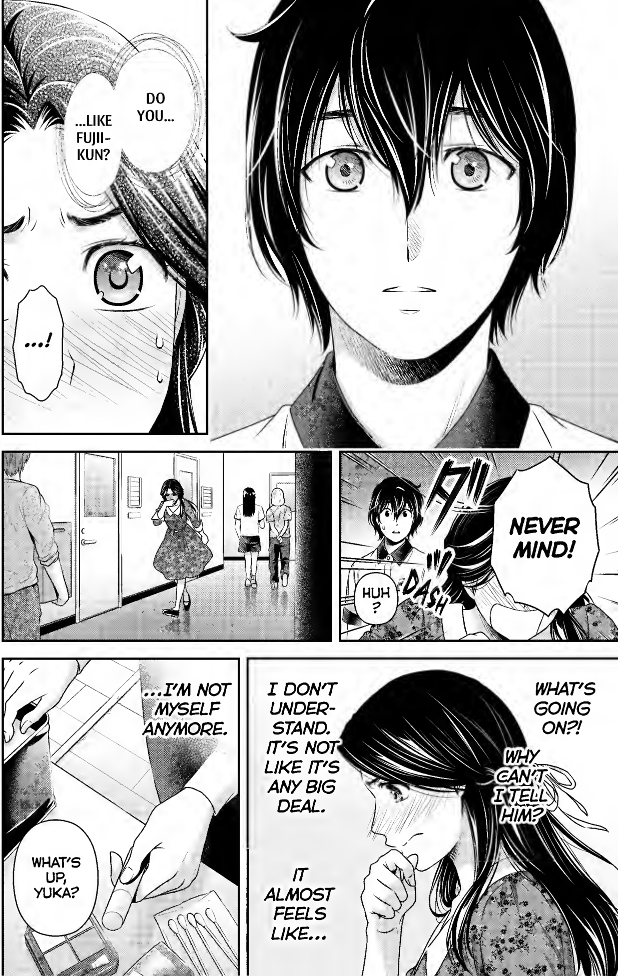

DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
HUH?
NO...
NOT REALLY.
MIYABI...
DO YOU...

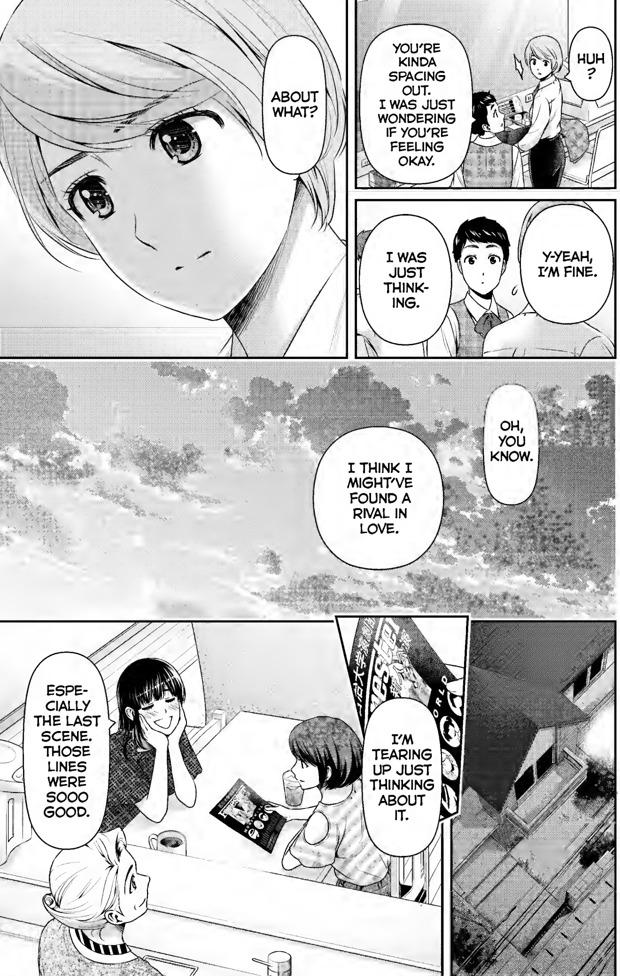
# CHAPTER 158: WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO YOUR WAY

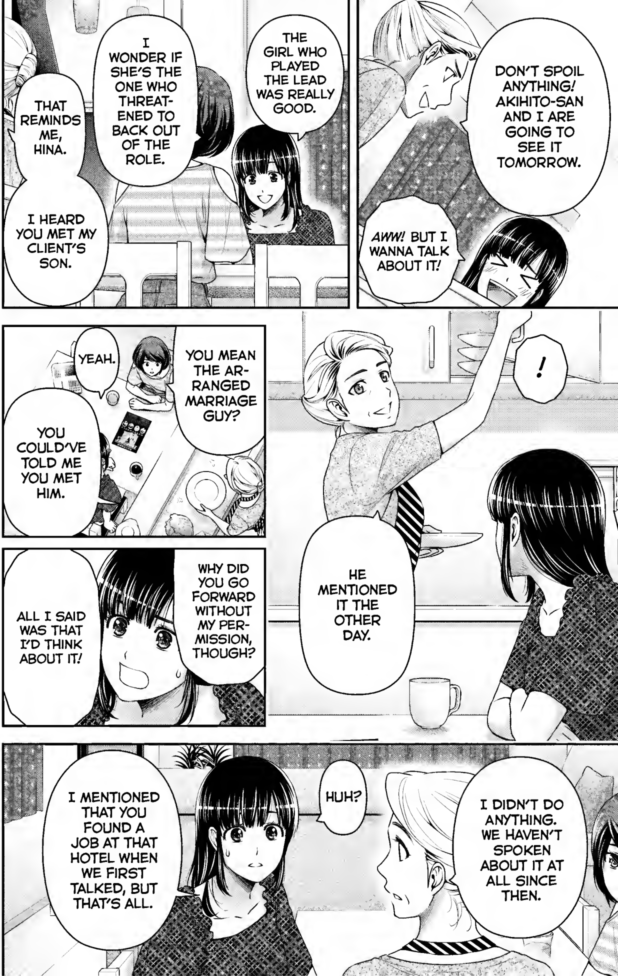

...LIKE FUJII-KUN?
SIGN: SISTER CRUMB
HUH?!
WHERE DID THAT COME FROM, YUKA?!
A-AS IF! DON'T BE RIDICULOUS!
I JUST WANTED TO THANK HIM FOR EVERYTHING HE'S DONE FOR ME DURING THIS PLAY!
OH, OKAY... SORRY.
YOU'D BETTER BE!

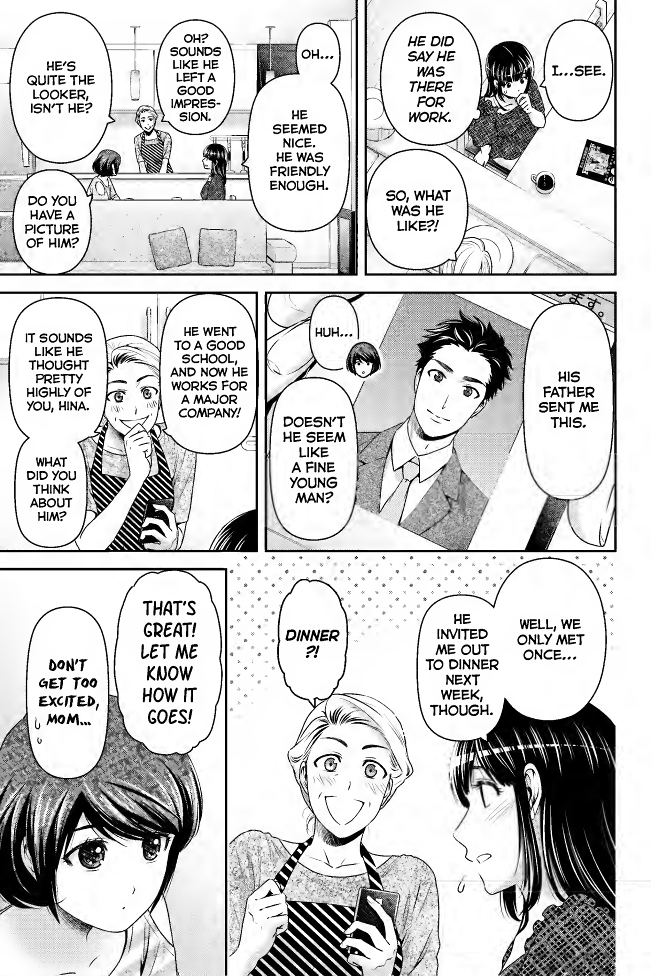

JEEZ. WHY WOULD SHE SAY THAT?
DO I LIKE HIM?
THAT'S JUST SILLY.
BESIDES, FUJII-KUN...
...ALREADY HAS A GIRLFRIEND.
NO, NO, NO!
WHIP WHIP WHIP
THAT'S NOT THE ONLY REASON I'M NOT INTERESTED!
HM?
YO, FUJII. WHERE WERE YOU?
BA DUMP
SORRY. I WAS CHATTING WITH SOME PEOPLE.
OHHH? Y'MEAN YOUR GIRLFRIEND?
SERIZAWA WAS LOOKING FOR YOU.
...!
SERIZAWA!

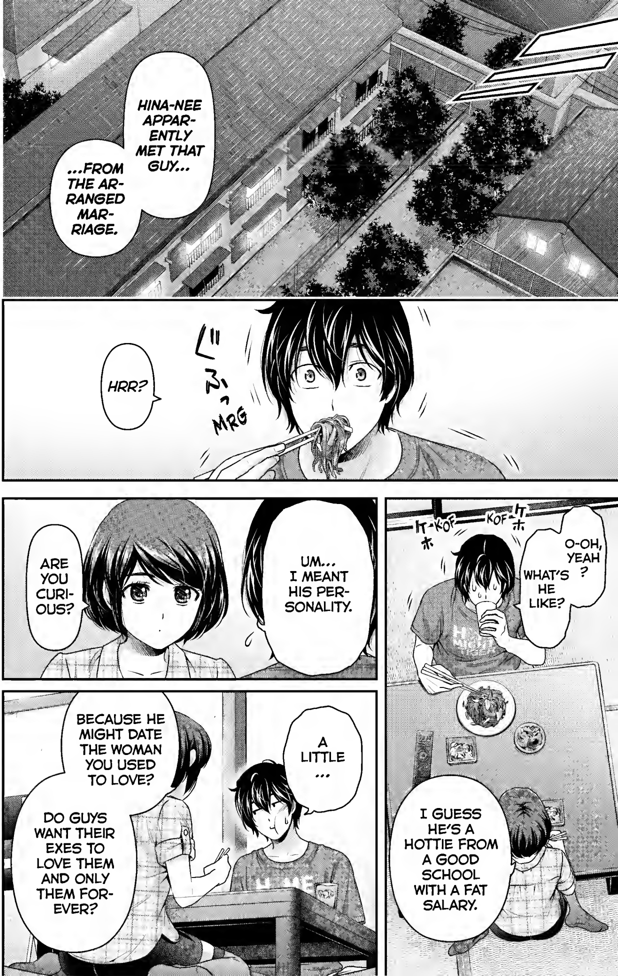

GREAT JOB!
THAT APPLAUSE WAS CRAZY, HUH?
Y-
YEAH.
YOU WERE AMAZING OUT THERE!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU MANAGED TO CRY DURING THE REAL DEAL!
EVEN I GOT A LITTLE CHOKED UP JUST WATCHING THROUGH THE MONITOR!
I-IT WAS A FLUKE...
HONESTLY, I WAS MOSTLY JUST REALLY MOVED BY ONE OF THE AUDIENCE MEMBERS.
OH, REALLY?
WAIT!
WHY AM I BEING SO NEGATIVE? I SHOULD BE THANKING HIM!
I ONLY PULLED THIS OFF BECAUSE OF HIM.
I NEED TO THANK HIM FOR EVERYTHING HE'S DONE FOR ME.
JUST SPIT IT OUT...!
UH,
UM...
I...!

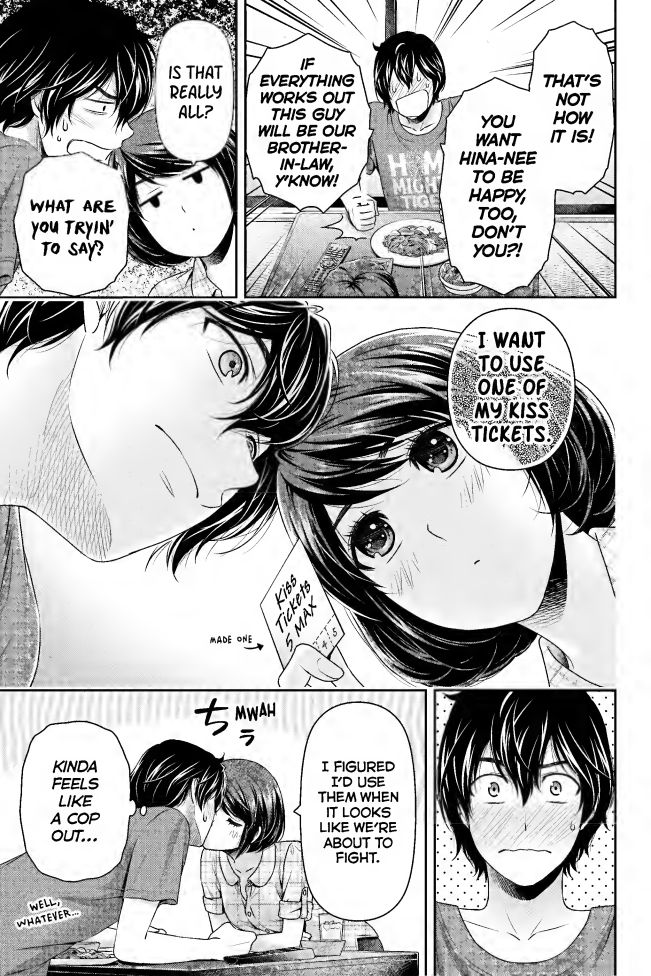

DO YOU...
...LIKE FUJII-KUN?
...!
NEVER MIND!
DASH
HUH?
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
WHY CAN'T I TELL HIM?
I DON'T UNDERSTAND. IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S ANY BIG DEAL.
IT ALMOST FEELS LIKE...
...I'M NOT MYSELF ANYMORE.
WHAT'S UP, YUKA?

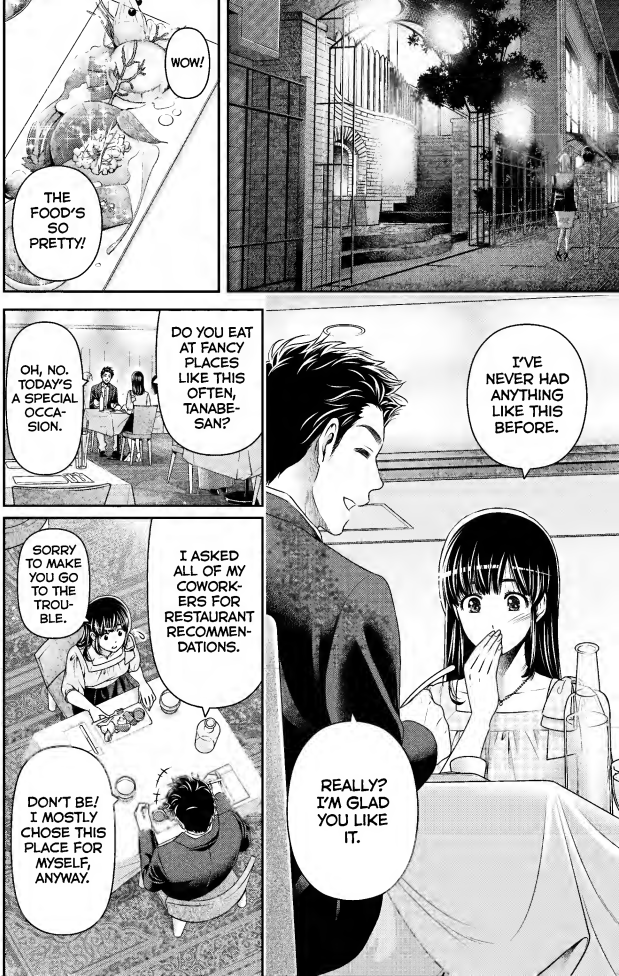

HUH?
YOU'RE KINDA SPACING OUT. I WAS JUST WONDERING IF YOU'RE FEELING OKAY.
Y-YEAH, I'M FINE.
I WAS JUST THINKING.
ABOUT WHAT?
OH, YOU KNOW.
I THINK I MIGHT'VE FOUND A RIVAL IN LOVE.
I'M TEARING UP JUST THINKING ABOUT IT.
ESPECIALLY THE LAST SCENE. THOSE LINES WERE SOOO GOOD.

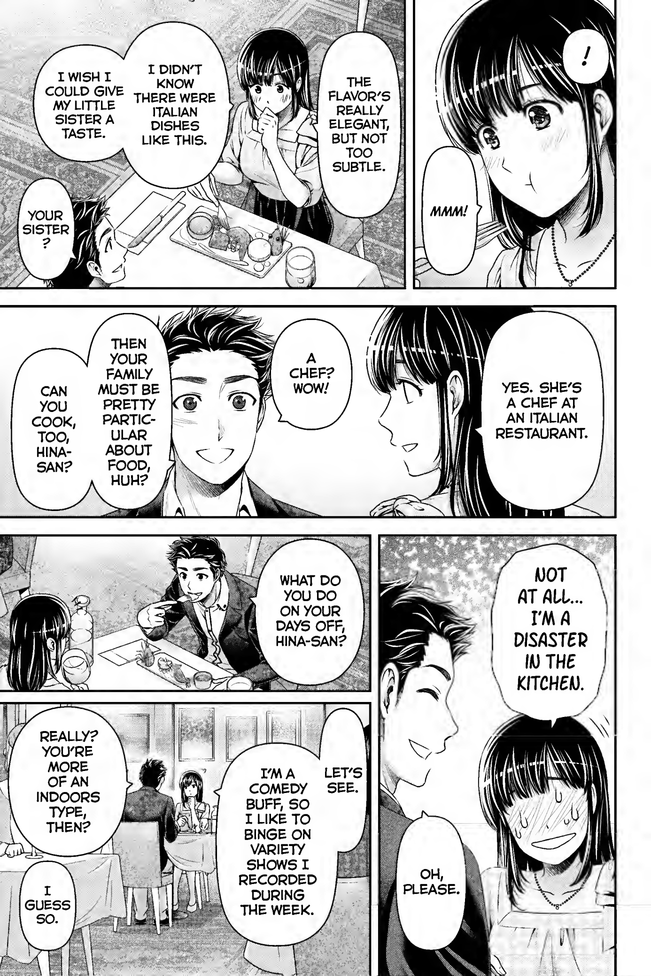

DON'T SPOIL ANYTHING! AKIHITO-SAN AND I ARE GOING TO SEE IT TOMORROW.
*AWW!* BUT I WANNA TALK ABOUT IT!
THE GIRL WHO PLAYED THE LEAD WAS REALLY GOOD.
I WONDER IF SHE'S THE ONE WHO THREATENED TO BACK OUT OF THE ROLE.
THAT REMINDS ME, HINA.
I HEARD YOU MET MY CLIENT'S SON.
!
HE MENTIONED IT THE OTHER DAY.
YOU MEAN THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE GUY?
YEAH.
YOU COULD'VE TOLD ME YOU MET HIM.
WHY DID YOU GO FORWARD WITHOUT MY PERMISSION, THOUGH?
ALL I SAID WAS THAT I'D THINK ABOUT IT!
I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. WE HAVEN'T SPOKEN ABOUT IT AT ALL SINCE THEN.
HUH?
I MENTIONED THAT YOU FOUND A JOB AT THAT HOTEL WHEN WE FIRST TALKED, BUT THAT'S ALL.

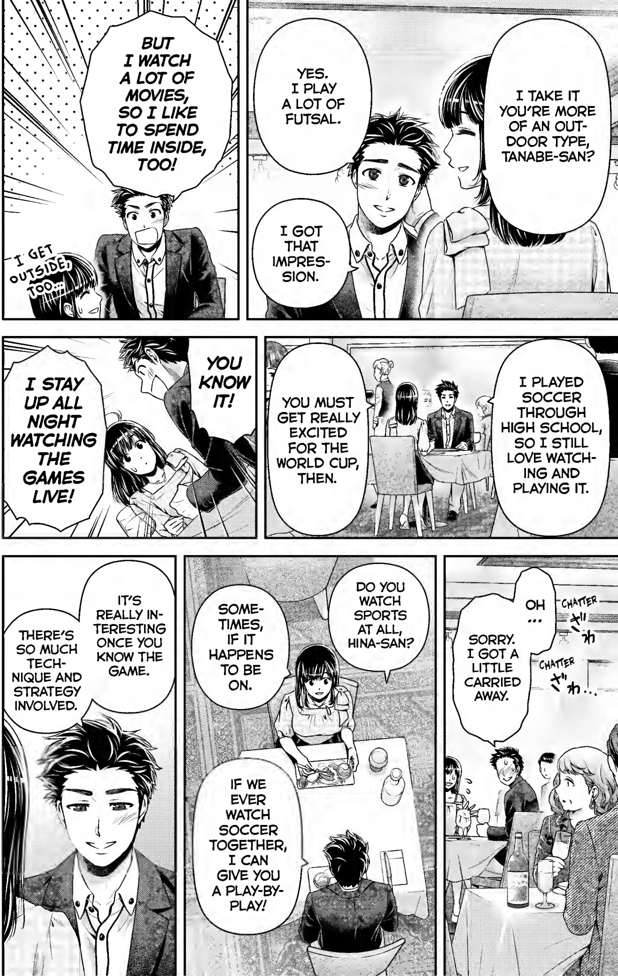

I...SEE.
HE DID SAY HE WAS THERE FOR WORK.
SO, WHAT WAS HE LIKE?!
OH...
HE SEEMED NICE. HE WAS FRIENDLY ENOUGH.
OH? SOUNDS LIKE HE LEFT A GOOD IMPRESSION.
HE'S QUITE THE LOOKER, ISN'T HE?
DO YOU HAVE A PICTURE OF HIM?
HIS FATHER SENT ME THIS.
HUH...
DOESN'T HE SEEM LIKE A FINE YOUNG MAN?
HE WENT TO A GOOD SCHOOL, AND NOW HE WORKS FOR A MAJOR COMPANY!
IT SOUNDS LIKE HE THOUGHT PRETTY HIGHLY OF YOU, HINA.
WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT HIM?
WELL, WE ONLY MET ONCE...
HE INVITED ME OUT TO DINNER NEXT WEEK, THOUGH.
DINNER?!
THAT'S GREAT! LET ME KNOW HOW IT GOES!
DON'T GET TOO EXCITED, MOM...

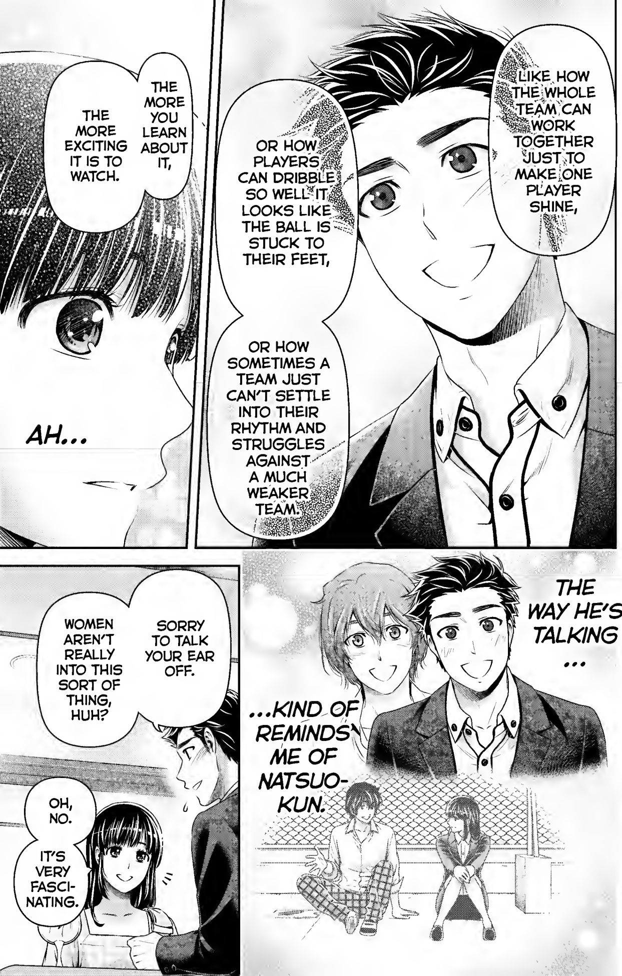

HINA-NEE APPARENTLY MET THAT GUY...
...FROM THE ARRANGED MARRIAGE.
ぐふっ
MRG
HRR?
ケホ KOF
KOF ケホ
O-OH, YEAH? WHAT'S HE LIKE?
I GUESS HE'S A HOTTIE FROM A GOOD SCHOOL WITH A FAT SALARY.
UM... I MEANT HIS PERSONALITY.
ARE YOU CURIOUS?
A LITTLE...
BECAUSE HE MIGHT DATE THE WOMAN YOU USED TO LOVE?
DO GUYS WANT THEIR EXES TO LOVE THEM AND ONLY THEM FOREVER?

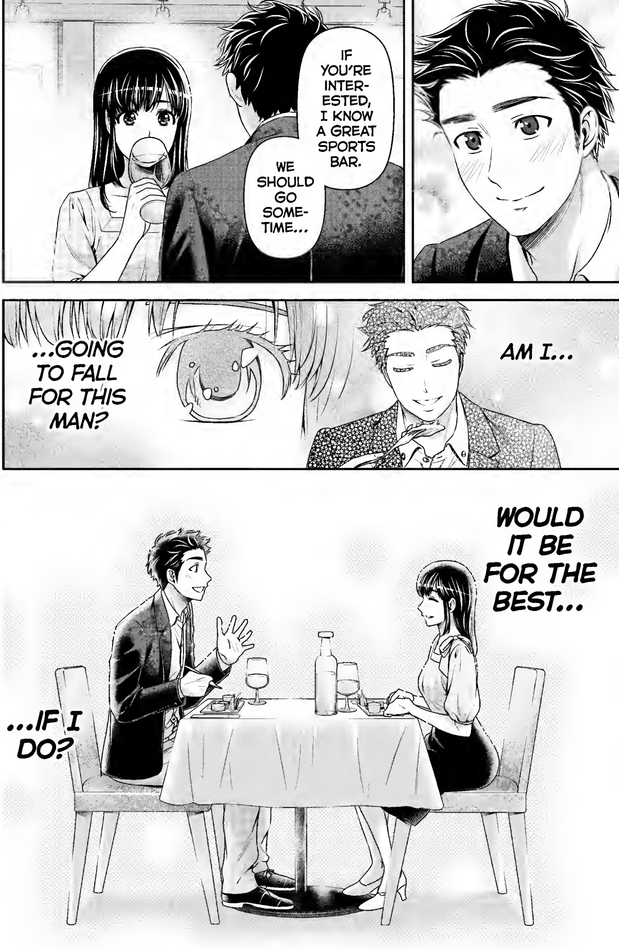

THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS!
YOU WANT HINA-NEE TO BE HAPPY, TOO, DON'T YOU?!
IF EVERYTHING WORKS OUT THIS GUY WILL BE OUR BROTHER-IN-LAW, Y'KNOW!
IS THAT REALLY ALL?
WHAT ARE YOU TRYIN' TO SAY?
I WANT TO USE ONE OF MY KISS TICKETS.
Kiss Tickets 5 MAX
4 5
MADE ONE
ち MWAH ラ
I FIGURED I'D USE THEM WHEN IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE ABOUT TO FIGHT.
KINDA FEELS LIKE A COP OUT...
WELL, WHATEVER...

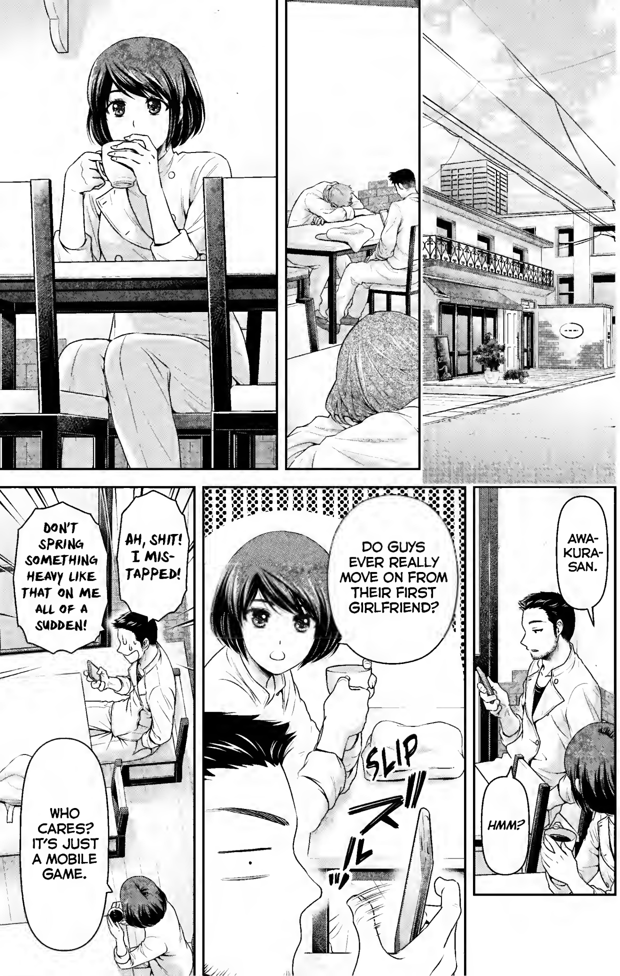

WOW!
THE FOOD'S SO PRETTY!
I'VE NEVER HAD ANYTHING LIKE THIS BEFORE.
REALLY? I'M GLAD YOU LIKE IT.
DO YOU EAT AT FANCY PLACES LIKE THIS OFTEN, TANABE-SAN?
OH, NO. TODAY'S A SPECIAL OCCASION.
I ASKED ALL OF MY COWORKERS FOR RESTAURANT RECOMMENDATIONS.
SORRY TO MAKE YOU GO TO THE TROUBLE.
DON'T BE! I MOSTLY CHOSE THIS PLACE FOR MYSELF, ANYWAY.

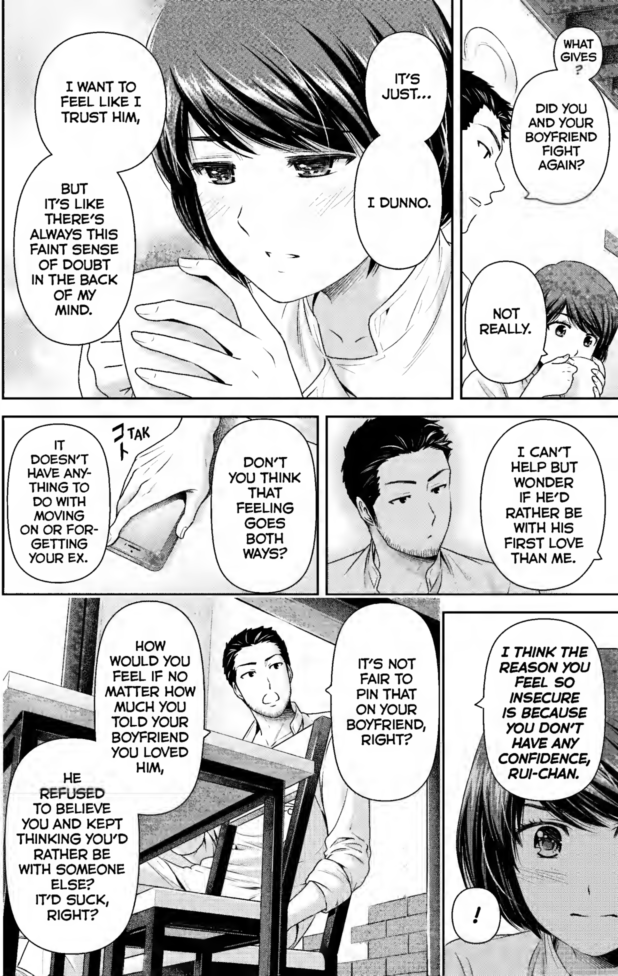

!
MMM!
THE FLAVOR'S REALLY ELEGANT, BUT NOT TOO SUBTLE.
I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WERE ITALIAN DISHES LIKE THIS.
I WISH I COULD GIVE MY LITTLE SISTER A TASTE.
YOUR SISTER?
YES. SHE'S A CHEF AT AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT.
A CHEF? WOW!
THEN YOUR FAMILY MUST BE PRETTY PARTICULAR ABOUT FOOD, HUH?
CAN YOU COOK, TOO, HINA-SAN?
NOT AT ALL... I'M A DISASTER IN THE KITCHEN.
OH, PLEASE.
WHAT DO YOU DO ON YOUR DAYS OFF, HINA-SAN?
LET'S SEE.
I'M A COMEDY BUFF, SO I LIKE TO BINGE ON VARIETY SHOWS I RECORDED DURING THE WEEK.
REALLY? YOU'RE MORE OF AN INDOORS TYPE, THEN?
I GUESS SO.

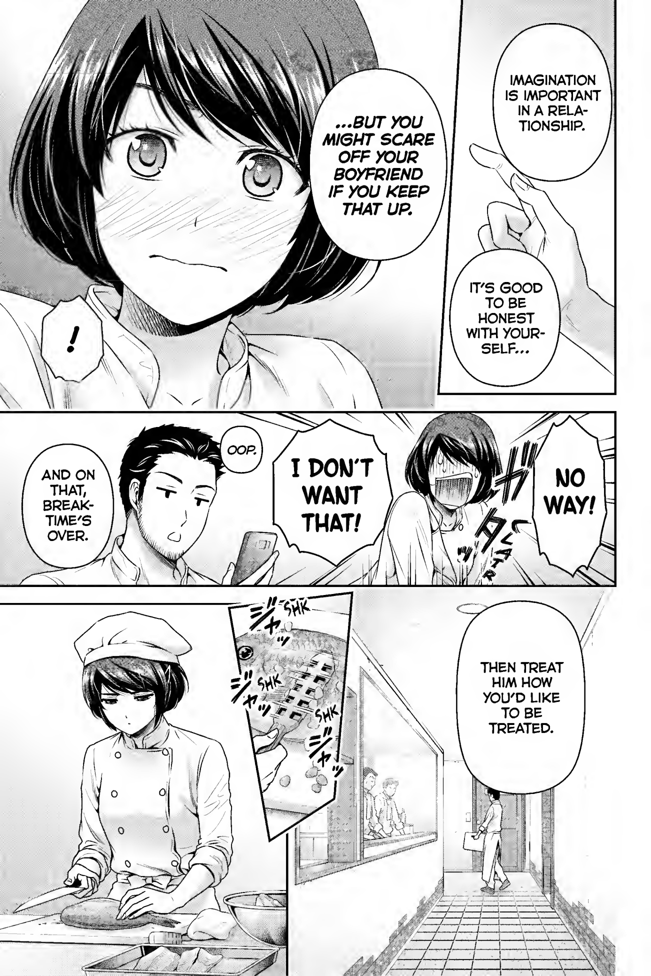

I TAKE IT YOU'RE MORE OF AN OUTDOOR TYPE, TANABE-SAN?
YES. I PLAY A LOT OF FUTSAL.
I GOT THAT IMPRESSION.
BUT I WATCH A LOT OF MOVIES, SO I LIKE TO SPEND TIME INSIDE, TOO!
I GET OUTSIDE, TOO...
I PLAYED SOCCER THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL, SO I STILL LOVE WATCHING AND PLAYING IT.
YOU MUST GET REALLY EXCITED FOR THE WORLD CUP, THEN.
YOU KNOW IT!
I STAY UP ALL NIGHT WATCHING THE GAMES LIVE!
CHATTER ざわ
CHATTER ざわ...
OH ...
SORRY. I GOT A LITTLE CARRIED AWAY.
DO YOU WATCH SPORTS AT ALL, HINA-SAN?
SOMETIMES, IF IT HAPPENS TO BE ON.
IF WE EVER WATCH SOCCER TOGETHER, I CAN GIVE YOU A PLAY-BY-PLAY!
IT'S REALLY INTERESTING ONCE YOU KNOW THE GAME.
THERE'S SO MUCH TECHNIQUE AND STRATEGY INVOLVED.

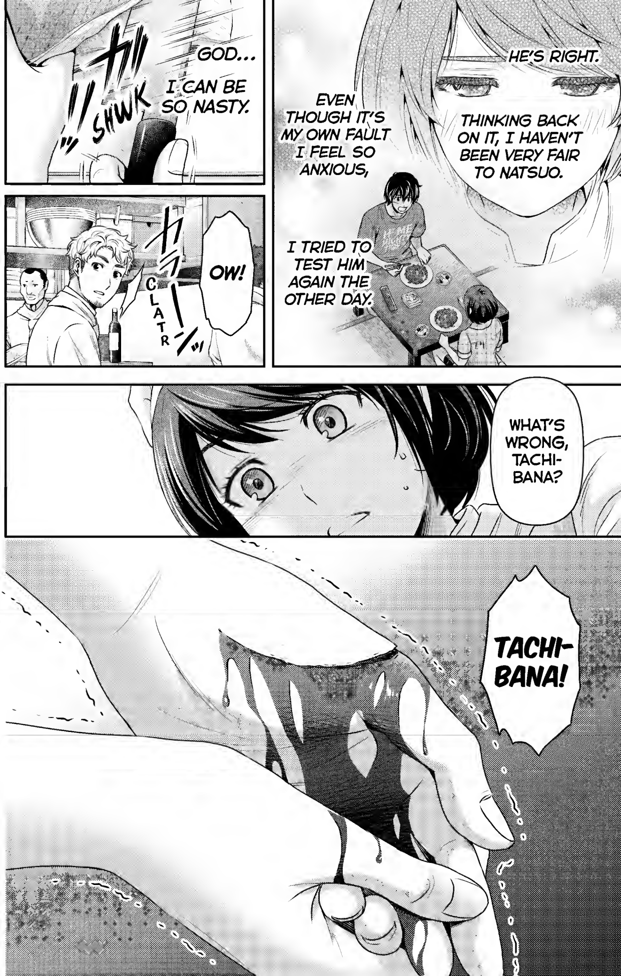

LIKE HOW THE WHOLE TEAM CAN WORK TOGETHER JUST TO MAKE ONE PLAYER SHINE,
OR HOW PLAYERS CAN DRIBBLE SO WELL IT LOOKS LIKE THE BALL IS STUCK TO THEIR FEET,
OR HOW SOMETIMES A TEAM JUST CAN'T SETTLE INTO THEIR RHYTHM AND STRUGGLES AGAINST A MUCH WEAKER TEAM.
THE MORE YOU LEARN ABOUT IT,
THE MORE EXCITING IT IS TO WATCH.
AH...
THE WAY HE'S TALKING...
...KIND OF REMINDS ME OF NATSUO-KUN.
SORRY TO TALK YOUR EAR OFF.
WOMEN AREN'T REALLY INTO THIS SORT OF THING, HUH?
OH, NO.
IT'S VERY FASCINATING.


IF YOU'RE INTERESTED, I KNOW A GREAT SPORTS BAR.
WE SHOULD GO SOMETIME...
AM I...
...GOING TO FALL FOR THIS MAN?
WOULD IT BE FOR THE BEST...
...IF I DO?

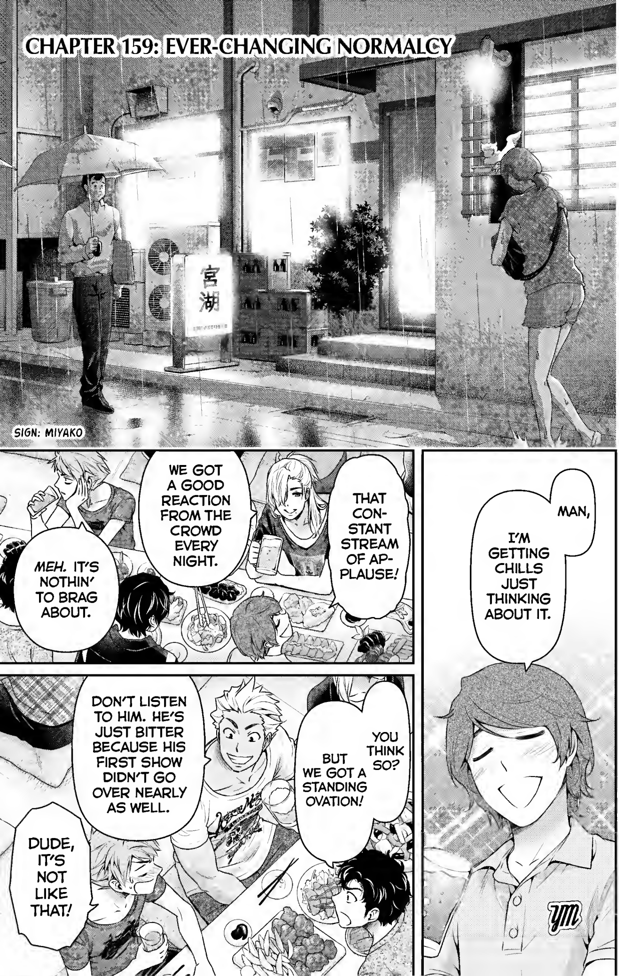

...
AWA-KURA-SAN.
HMM?
DO GUYS EVER REALLY MOVE ON FROM THEIR FIRST GIRLFRIEND?
SLIP
ズル
AH, SHIT! I MIS-TAPPED!
DON'T SPRING SOMETHING HEAVY LIKE THAT ON ME ALL OF A SUDDEN!
WHO CARES? IT'S JUST A MOBILE GAME.

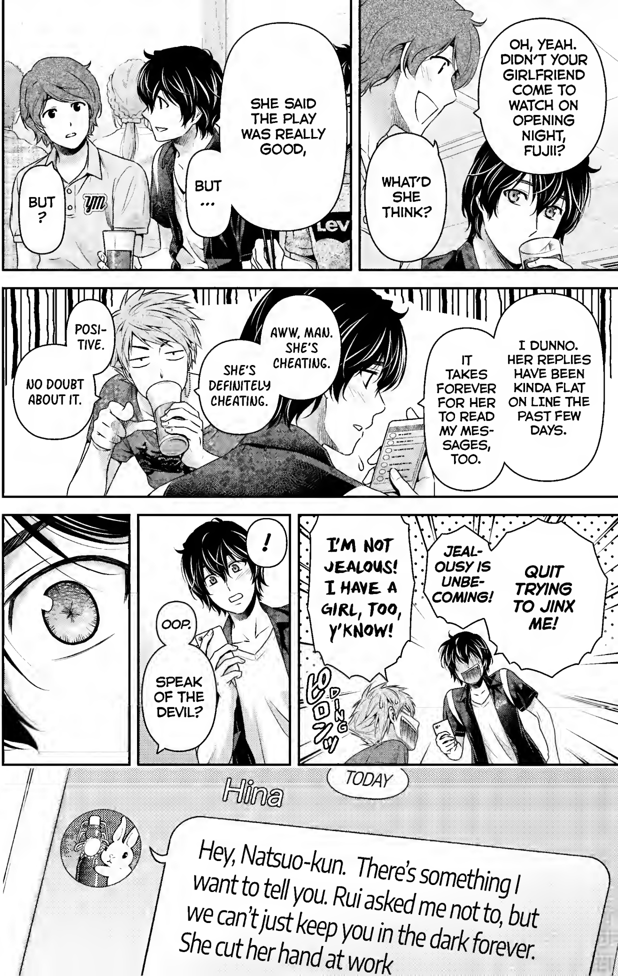

WHAT GIVES?
DID YOU AND YOUR BOYFRIEND FIGHT AGAIN?
NOT REALLY.
IT'S JUST... I DUNNO.
I WANT TO FEEL LIKE I TRUST HIM,
BUT IT'S LIKE THERE'S ALWAYS THIS FAINT SENSE OF DOUBT IN THE BACK OF MY MIND.
I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER IF HE'D RATHER BE WITH HIS FIRST LOVE THAN ME.
DON'T YOU THINK THAT FEELING GOES BOTH WAYS?
TAK
IT DOESN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH MOVING ON OR FORGETTING YOUR EX.
I THINK THE REASON YOU FEEL SO INSECURE IS BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE, RUI-CHAN.
!
IT'S NOT FAIR TO PIN THAT ON YOUR BOYFRIEND, RIGHT?
HOW WOULD YOU FEEL IF NO MATTER HOW MUCH YOU TOLD YOUR BOYFRIEND YOU LOVED HIM,
HE REFUSED TO BELIEVE YOU AND KEPT THINKING YOU'D RATHER BE WITH SOMEONE ELSE? IT'D SUCK, RIGHT?


IMAGINATION IS IMPORTANT IN A RELATIONSHIP.
IT'S GOOD TO BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF...
...BUT YOU MIGHT SCARE OFF YOUR BOYFRIEND IF YOU KEEP THAT UP.
!
NO WAY!
ガタッ
CLATR
I DON'T WANT THAT!
OOP.
AND ON THAT, BREAKTIME'S OVER.
THEN TREAT HIM HOW YOU'D LIKE TO BE TREATED.
ジャッ SHK
ジャッ SHK
ジャッ SHK

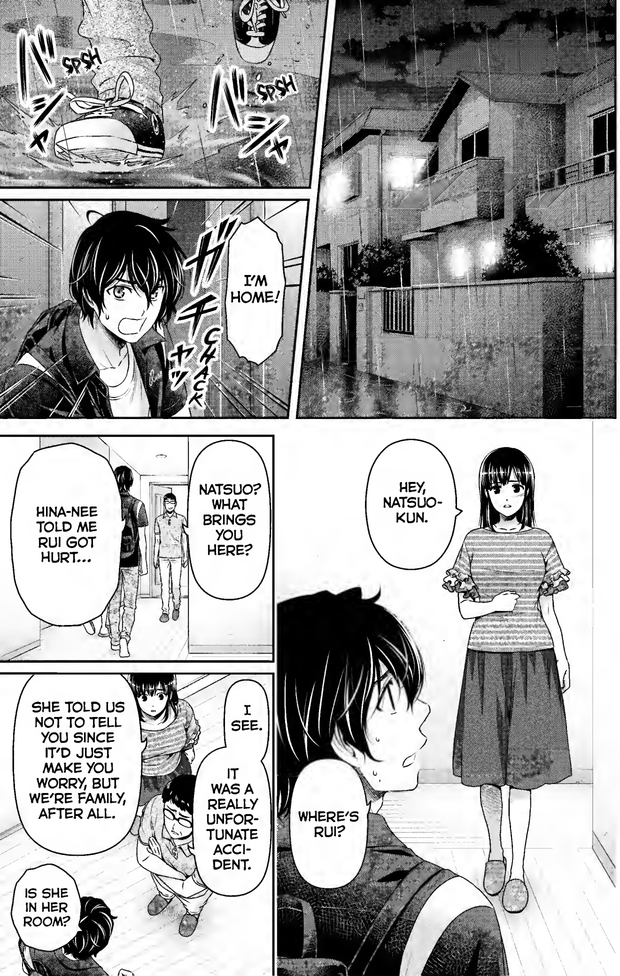

HE'S RIGHT.
THINKING BACK ON IT, I HAVEN'T BEEN VERY FAIR TO NATSUO.
I TRIED TO TEST HIM AGAIN THE OTHER DAY.
EVEN THOUGH IT'S MY OWN FAULT I FEEL SO ANXIOUS,
GOD...
I CAN BE SO NASTY.
SHWK
OW!
CLATR
WHAT'S WRONG, TACHIBANA?
TACHIBANA!

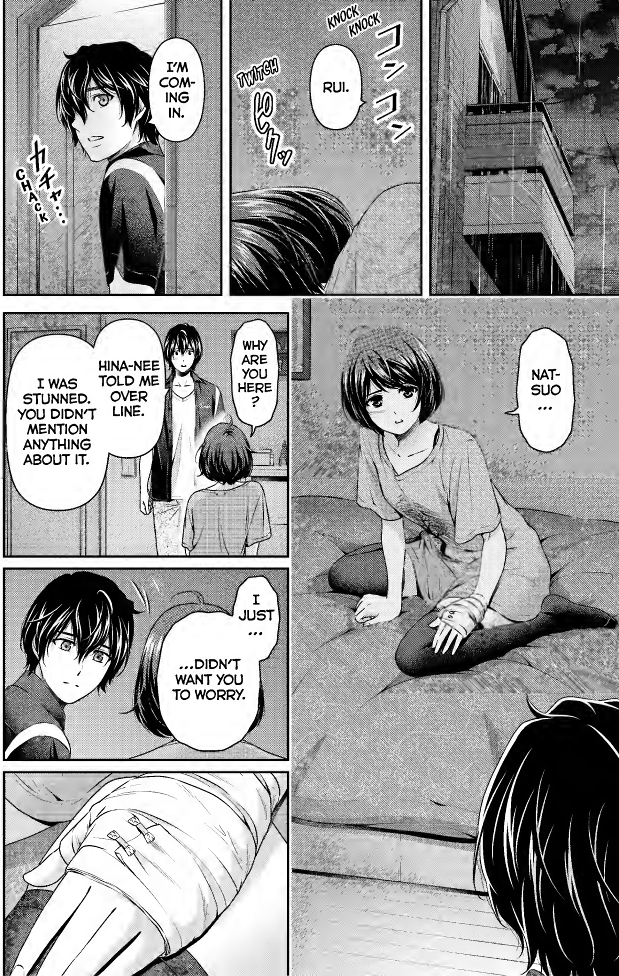
# CHAPTER 159: EVER-CHANGING NORMALCY

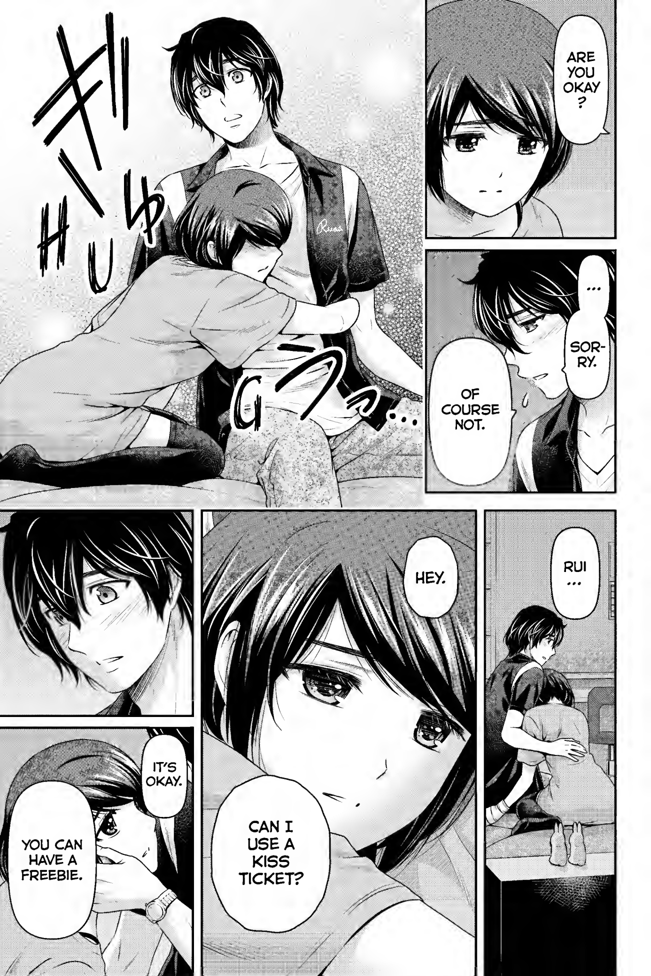

宮湖
SIGN: MIYAKO
MAN, I'M GETTING CHILLS JUST THINKING ABOUT IT.
THAT CON-STANT STREAM OF AP-PLAUSE!
WE GOT A GOOD REACTION FROM THE CROWD EVERY NIGHT.
*MEH.* IT'S NOTHIN' TO BRAG ABOUT.
YOU THINK SO?
BUT WE GOT A STANDING OVATION!
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM. HE'S JUST BITTER BECAUSE HIS FIRST SHOW DIDN'T GO OVER NEARLY AS WELL.
DUDE, IT'S NOT LIKE THAT!


OH, YEAH. DIDN'T YOUR GIRLFRIEND COME TO WATCH ON OPENING NIGHT, FUJII?
WHAT'D SHE THINK?
SHE SAID THE PLAY WAS REALLY GOOD,
BUT ...
BUT ?
I DUNNO. HER REPLIES HAVE BEEN KINDA FLAT ON LINE THE PAST FEW DAYS.
IT TAKES FOREVER FOR HER TO READ MY MESSAGES, TOO.
AWW, MAN. SHE'S CHEATING.
SHE'S DEFINITELY CHEATING.
POSITIVE.
NO DOUBT ABOUT IT.
QUIT TRYING TO JINX ME!
JEALOUSY IS UNBECOMING!
I'M NOT JEALOUS! I HAVE A GIRL, TOO, Y'KNOW!
ピロリッ
DING
!
OOP.
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL?
Hina
TODAY

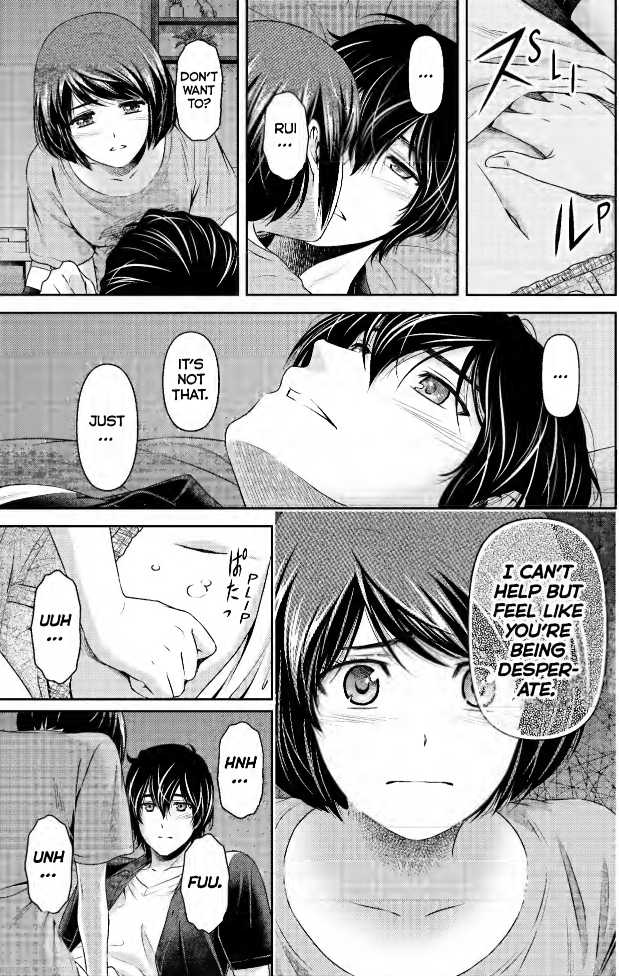
Hey, Natsuo-kun. There's something I want to tell you. Rui asked me not to, but we can't just keep you in the dark forever. She cut her hand at work

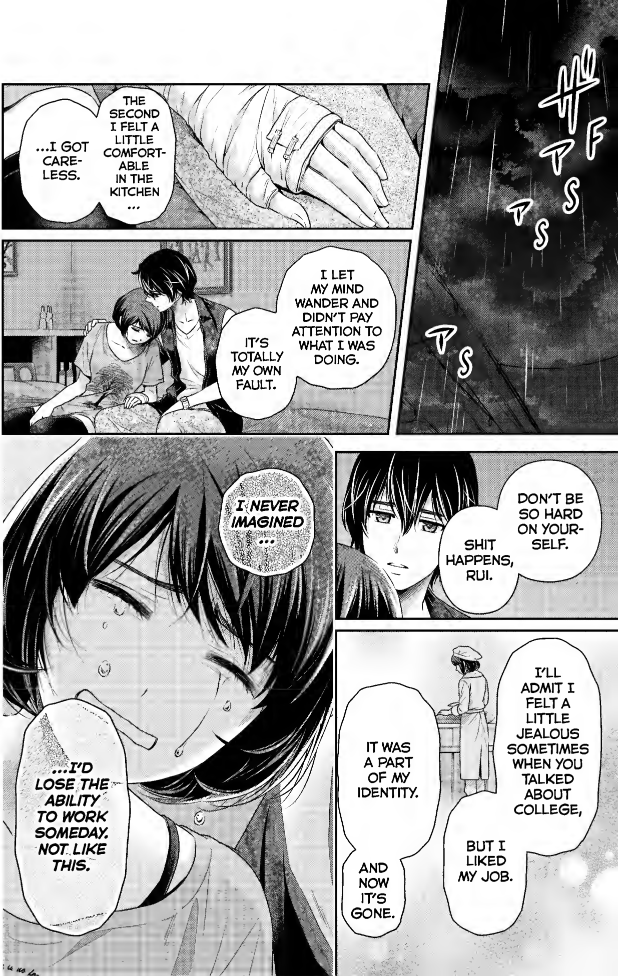

バシャ SPSH
バシャ SPSH
ガチャッ CHACK
I'M HOME!
HEY, NATSUO-KUN.
WHERE'S RUI?
NATSUO? WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE?
HINA-NEE TOLD ME RUI GOT HURT...
I SEE.
IT WAS A REALLY UNFORTUNATE ACCIDENT.
SHE TOLD US NOT TO TELL YOU SINCE IT'D JUST MAKE YOU WORRY, BUT WE'RE FAMILY, AFTER ALL.
IS SHE IN HER ROOM?

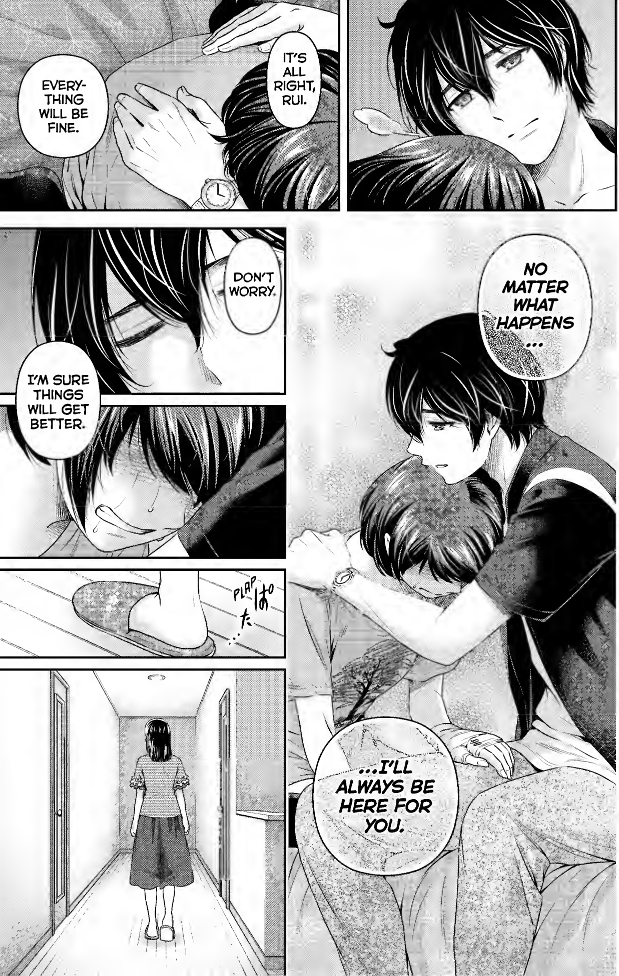

KNOCK KNOCK
コンコン
RUI.
TWITCH
ピクッ
I'M COMING IN.
カチャ…
CHACK
NATSUO…
WHY ARE YOU HERE?
HINA-NEE TOLD ME OVER LINE.
I WAS STUNNED. YOU DIDN'T MENTION ANYTHING ABOUT IT.
I JUST…
…DIDN'T WANT YOU TO WORRY.

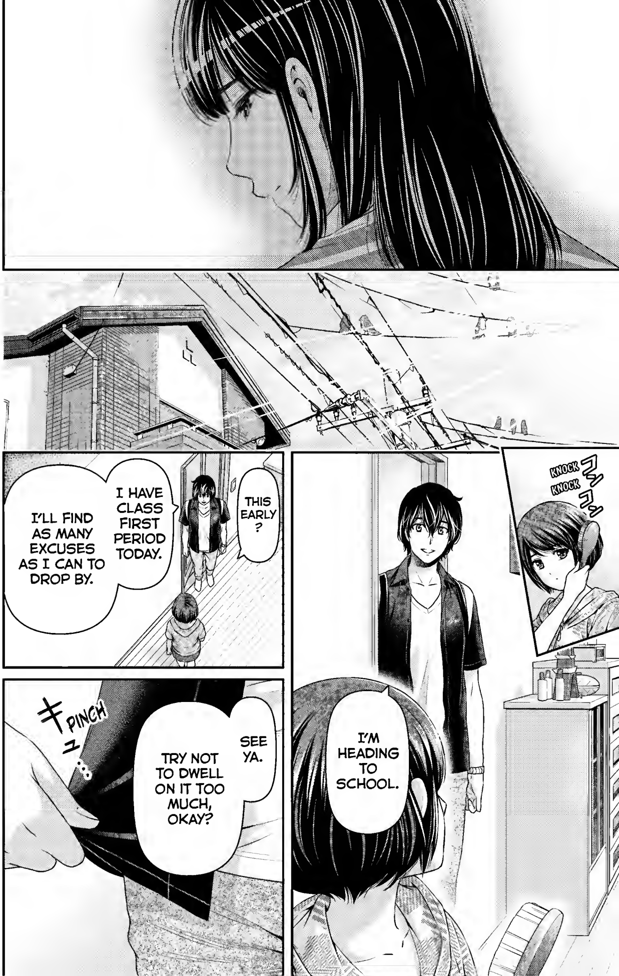

ARE YOU OKAY?
...
SORRY.
OF COURSE NOT.
ぎゅ
HUG
ぐっ…
G
RUI...
HEY.
CAN I USE A KISS TICKET?
IT'S OKAY.
YOU CAN HAVE A FREEBIE.

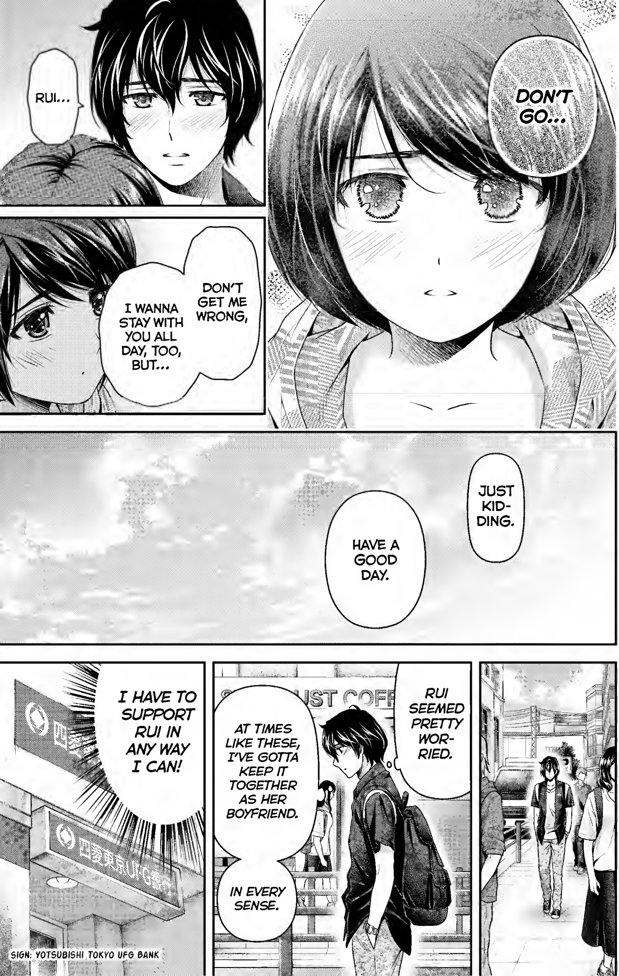
MM...
AH.
HAA.
HNN...
MMF.
MMM.
ばちっ
MMF
ふっ
HMF...
MM...


ズル
SLIP
...
RUI ...
DON'T WANT TO?
...
IT'S NOT THAT.
JUST ...
I CAN'T HELP BUT FEEL LIKE YOU'RE BEING DESPERATE.
ぽたっ
PLIP
UUH ...
HNH ...
FUU.
UNH ...

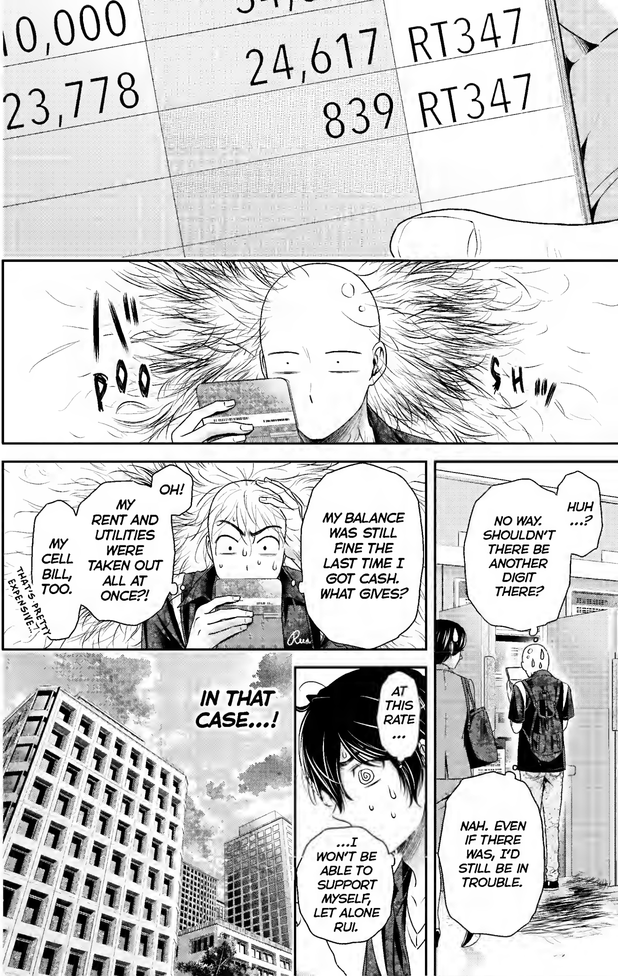

FHH
PS
PS
PS
THE SECOND I FELT A LITTLE COMFORTABLE IN THE KITCHEN...
...I GOT CARELESS.
I LET MY MIND WANDER AND DIDN'T PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I WAS DOING.
IT'S TOTALLY MY OWN FAULT.
DON'T BE SO HARD ON YOURSELF.
SHIT HAPPENS, RUI.
I'LL ADMIT I FELT A LITTLE JEALOUS SOMETIMES WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT COLLEGE,
BUT I LIKED MY JOB.
IT WAS A PART OF MY IDENTITY.
AND NOW IT'S GONE.
I NEVER IMAGINED...
...I'D LOSE THE ABILITY TO WORK SOMEDAY. NOT LIKE THIS.

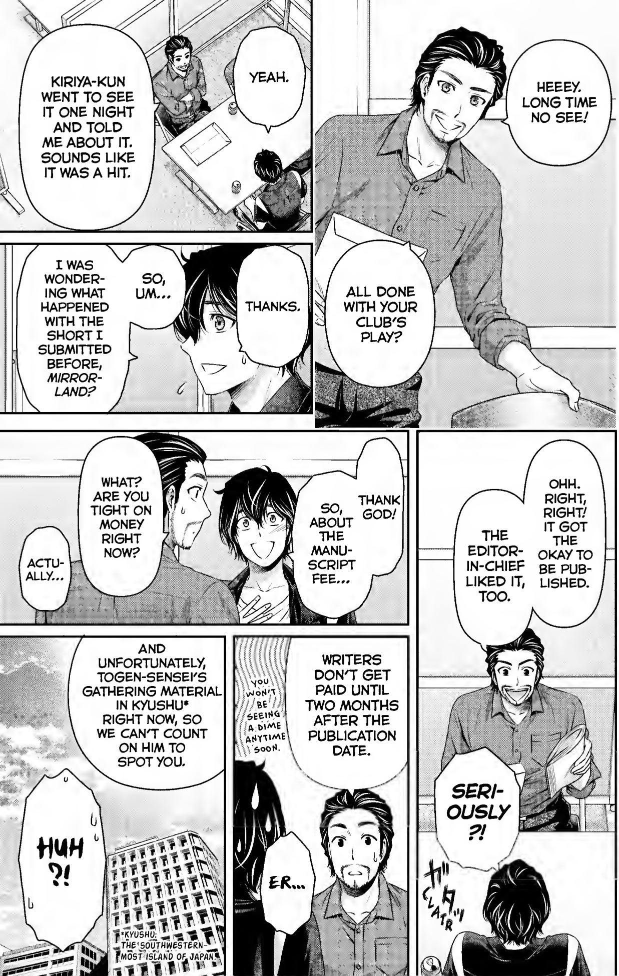

IT'S ALL RIGHT, RUI.
EVERY-THING WILL BE FINE.
NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS...
...I'LL ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU.
DON'T WORRY.
I'M SURE THINGS WILL GET BETTER.
PLAP
ぱた…

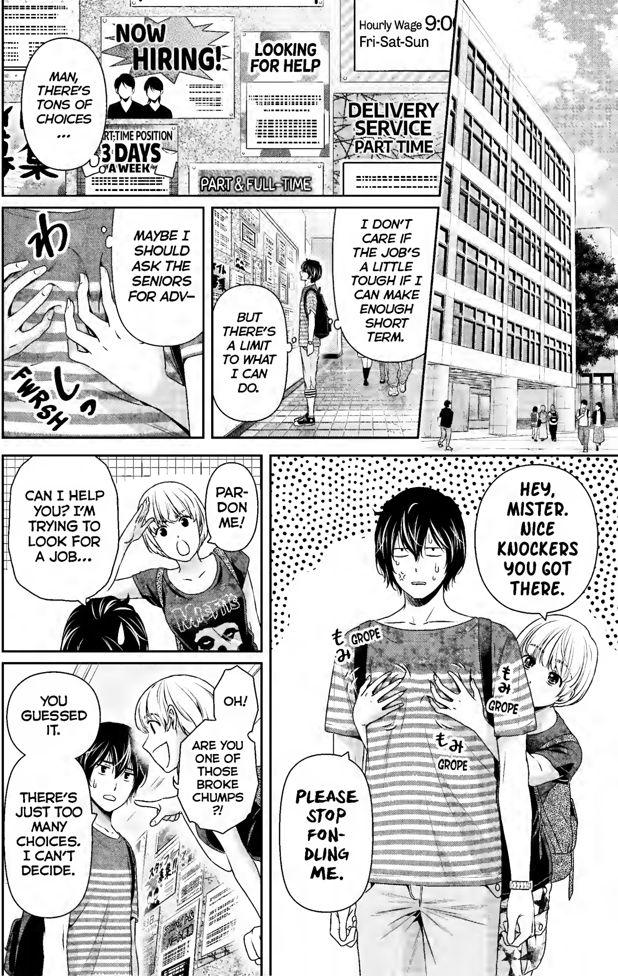

KNOCK コン
KNOCK コン
I'M HEADING TO SCHOOL.
THIS EARLY?
I HAVE CLASS FIRST PERIOD TODAY.
I'LL FIND AS MANY EXCUSES AS I CAN TO DROP BY.
SEE YA.
TRY NOT TO DWELL ON IT TOO MUCH, OKAY?
キュ PINCH
ッ...

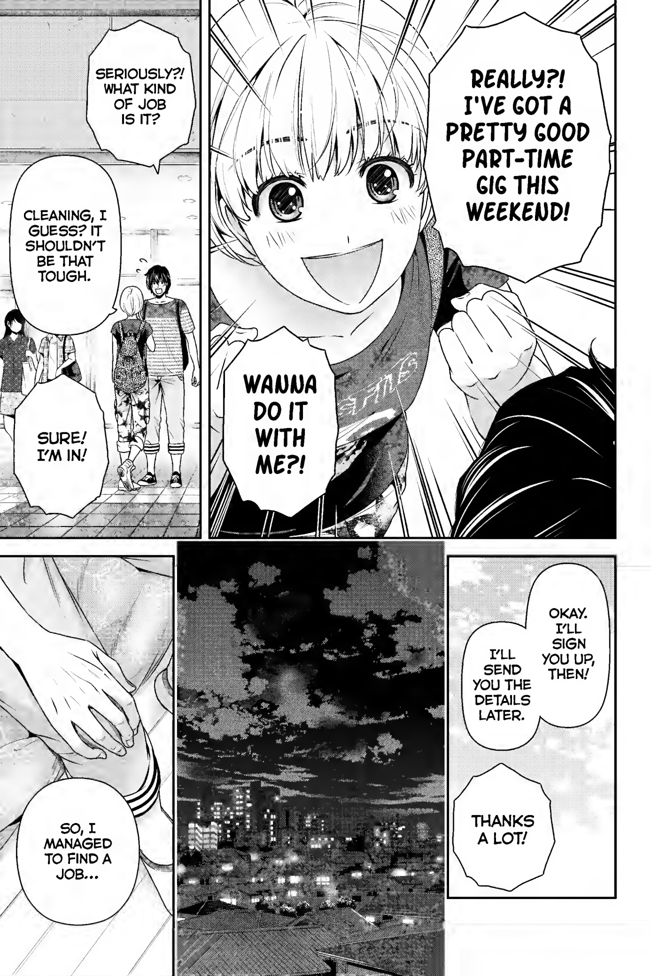

DON'T GO...
RUI...
DON'T GET ME WRONG,
I WANNA STAY WITH YOU ALL DAY, TOO, BUT...
JUST KIDDING.
HAVE A GOOD DAY.
RUI SEEMED PRETTY WORRIED.
AT TIMES LIKE THESE, I'VE GOTTA KEEP IT TOGETHER AS HER BOYFRIEND.
IN EVERY SENSE.
I HAVE TO SUPPORT RUI IN ANY WAY I CAN!

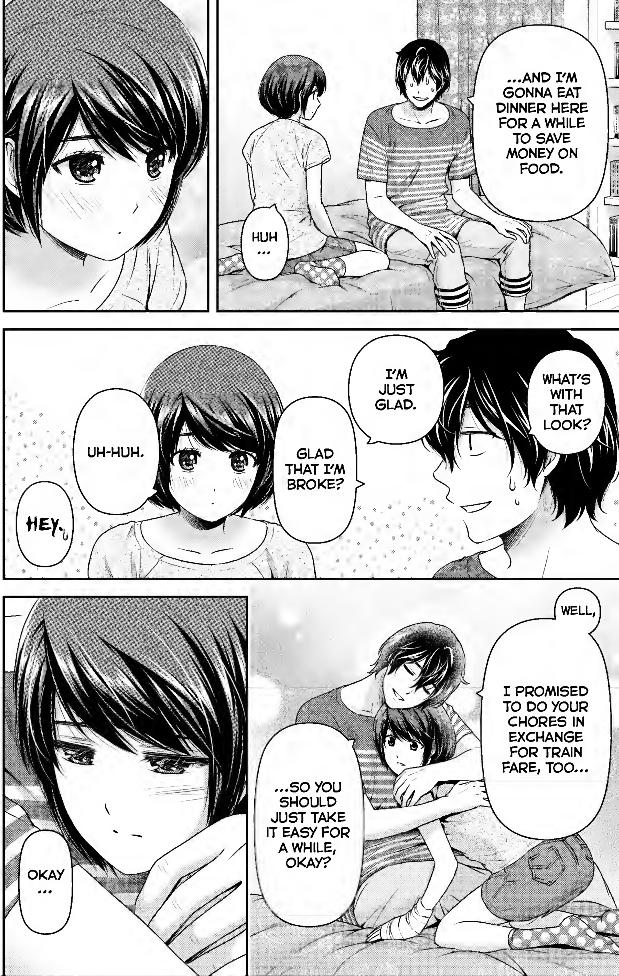
SIGN: YOTSUBISHI TOKYO UFG BANK

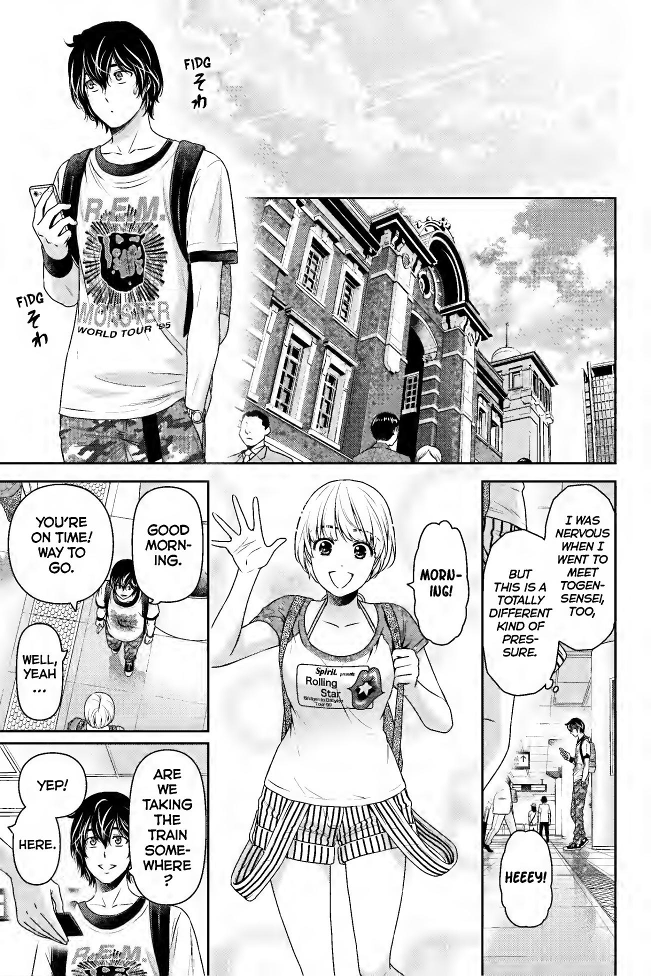

24,617 RT347
23,778
839 RT347
POOSH
HUH ...?
NO WAY. SHOULDN'T THERE BE ANOTHER DIGIT THERE?
NAH. EVEN IF THERE WAS, I'D STILL BE IN TROUBLE.
MY BALANCE WAS STILL FINE THE LAST TIME I GOT CASH. WHAT GIVES?
OH! MY RENT AND UTILITIES WERE TAKEN OUT ALL AT ONCE?!
MY CELL BILL, TOO.
THAT'S PRETTY EXPENSIVE...
AT THIS RATE...
...I WON'T BE ABLE TO SUPPORT MYSELF, LET ALONE RUI.
IN THAT CASE...!

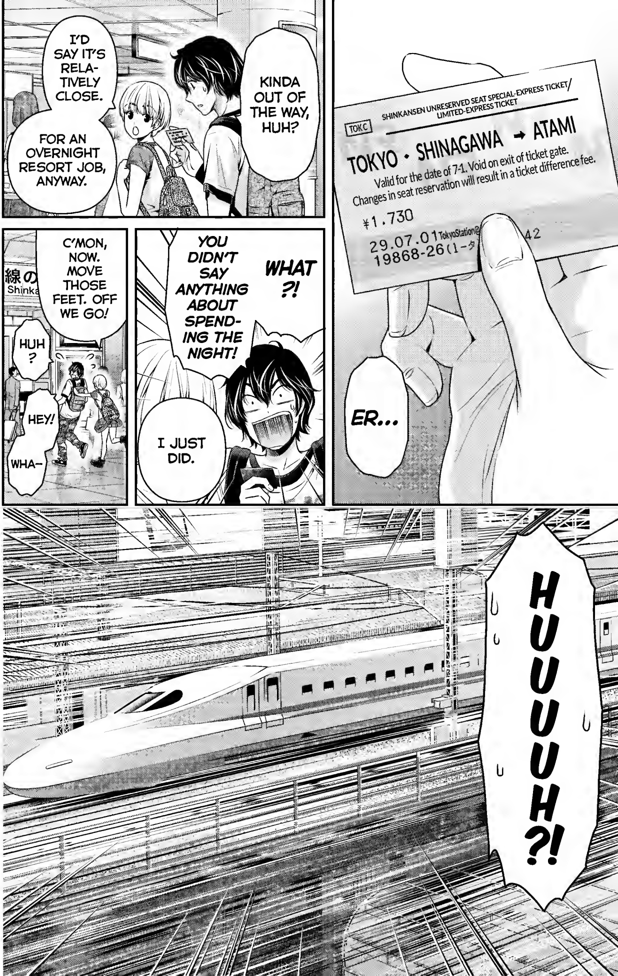

HEEEY. LONG TIME NO SEE!
ALL DONE WITH YOUR CLUB'S PLAY?
YEAH.
KIRIYA-KUN WENT TO SEE IT ONE NIGHT AND TOLD ME ABOUT IT. SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS A HIT.
THANKS.
SO, UM...
I WAS WONDERING WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE SHORT I SUBMITTED BEFORE, *MIRRORLAND?*
OHH. RIGHT, RIGHT! IT GOT THE OKAY TO BE PUBLISHED.
THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LIKED IT, TOO.
SERIOUSLY?!
CLATR
THANK GOD!
SO, ABOUT THE MANUSCRIPT FEE...
WHAT? ARE YOU TIGHT ON MONEY RIGHT NOW?
ACTUALLY...
WRITERS DON'T GET PAID UNTIL TWO MONTHS AFTER THE PUBLICATION DATE.
YOU WON'T BE SEEING A DIME ANYTIME SOON.
ER...
AND UNFORTUNATELY, TOGEN-SENSEI'S GATHERING MATERIAL IN KYUSHU* RIGHT NOW, SO WE CAN'T COUNT ON HIM TO SPOT YOU.
HUH?!
*KYUSHU: THE SOUTHWESTERN-MOST ISLAND OF JAPAN.


Hourly Wage 9:0
Fri-Sat-Sun
NOW HIRING!
LOOKING FOR HELP
DELIVERY SERVICE PART TIME
ART-TIME POSITION 3 DAYS A WEEK
PART & FULL-TIME
MAN, THERE'S TONS OF CHOICES ...
I DON'T CARE IF THE JOB'S A LITTLE TOUGH IF I CAN MAKE ENOUGH SHORT TERM.
BUT THERE'S A LIMIT TO WHAT I CAN DO.
MAYBE I SHOULD ASK THE SENIORS FOR ADV–
わ
しっ
FWRSH
HEY, MISTER. NICE KNOCKERS YOU GOT THERE.
もみ GROPE
もみ GROPE
もみ GROPE
PLEASE STOP FONDLING ME.
PARDON ME!
CAN I HELP YOU? I'M TRYING TO LOOK FOR A JOB...
OH!
ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE BROKE CHUMPS?!
YOU GUESSED IT.
THERE'S JUST TOO MANY CHOICES. I CAN'T DECIDE.

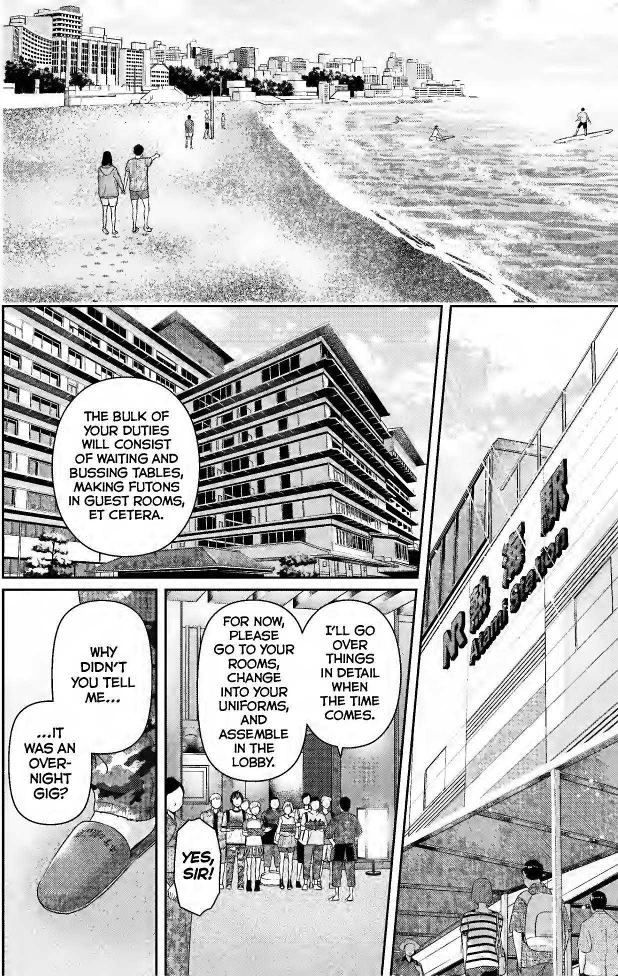

REALLY?! I'VE GOT A PRETTY GOOD PART-TIME GIG THIS WEEKEND!
WANNA DO IT WITH ME?!
SERIOUSLY?! WHAT KIND OF JOB IS IT?
CLEANING, I GUESS? IT SHOULDN'T BE THAT TOUGH.
SURE! I'M IN!
OKAY. I'LL SIGN YOU UP, THEN!
I'LL SEND YOU THE DETAILS LATER.
THANKS A LOT!
SO, I MANAGED TO FIND A JOB...

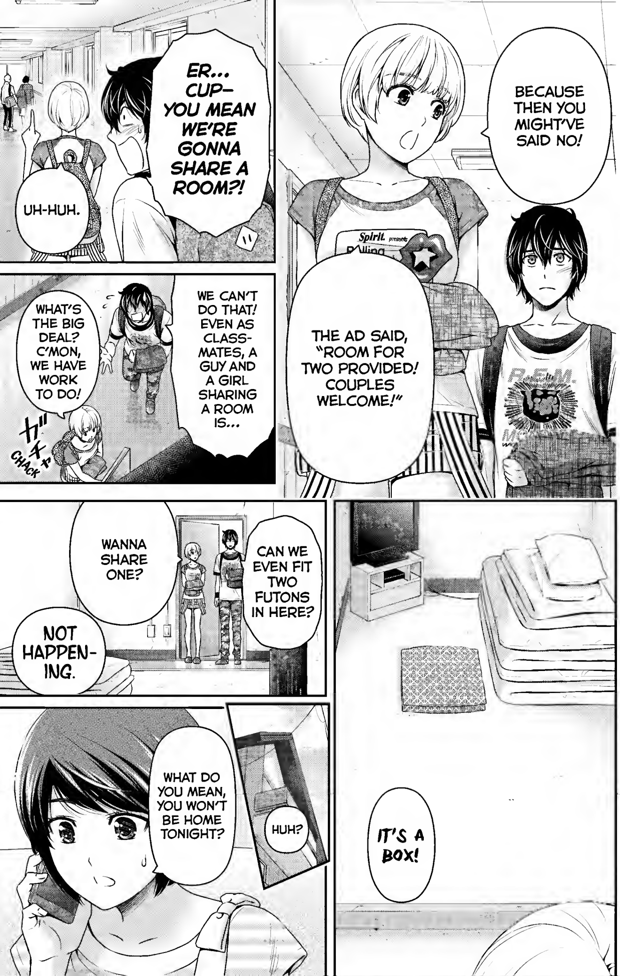

...AND I'M GONNA EAT DINNER HERE FOR A WHILE TO SAVE MONEY ON FOOD.
HUH ...
WHAT'S WITH THAT LOOK?
I'M JUST GLAD.
GLAD THAT I'M BROKE?
UH-HUH.
HEY.
WELL,
I PROMISED TO DO YOUR CHORES IN EXCHANGE FOR TRAIN FARE, TOO...
...SO YOU SHOULD JUST TAKE IT EASY FOR A WHILE, OKAY?
OKAY ...

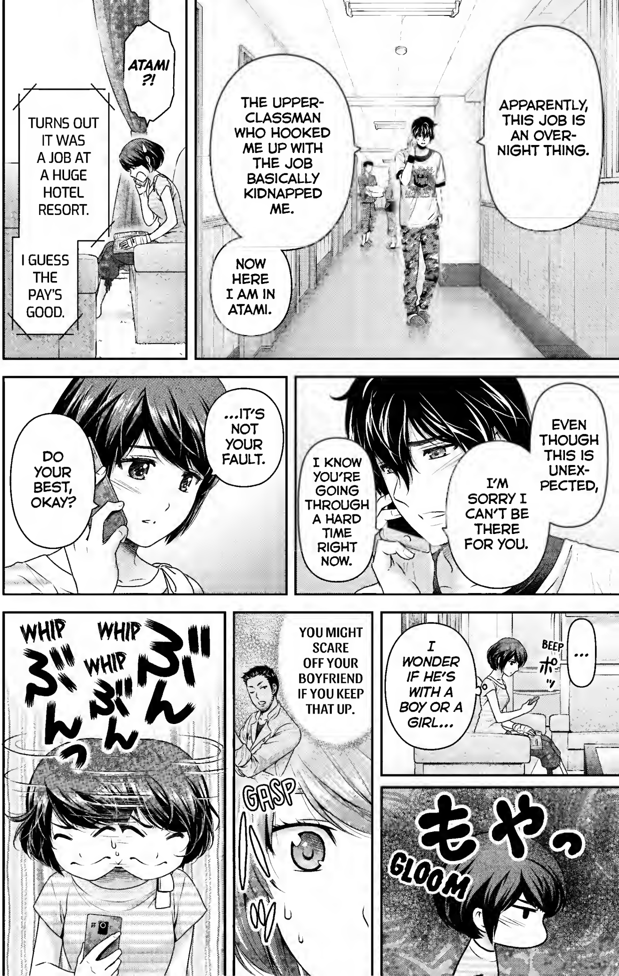

FIDG
そわ
FIDG
そわ
R.E.M.
MONSTER
WORLD TOUR '95
I WAS NERVOUS WHEN I WENT TO MEET TOGEN-SENSEI, TOO,
BUT THIS IS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT KIND OF PRESSURE.
HEEEY!
MORNING!
Spirit presents
Rolling Star
Bridges to Babylon Tour 98
GOOD MORNING.
YOU'RE ON TIME! WAY TO GO.
WELL, YEAH...
ARE WE TAKING THE TRAIN SOMEWHERE?
YEP!
HERE.

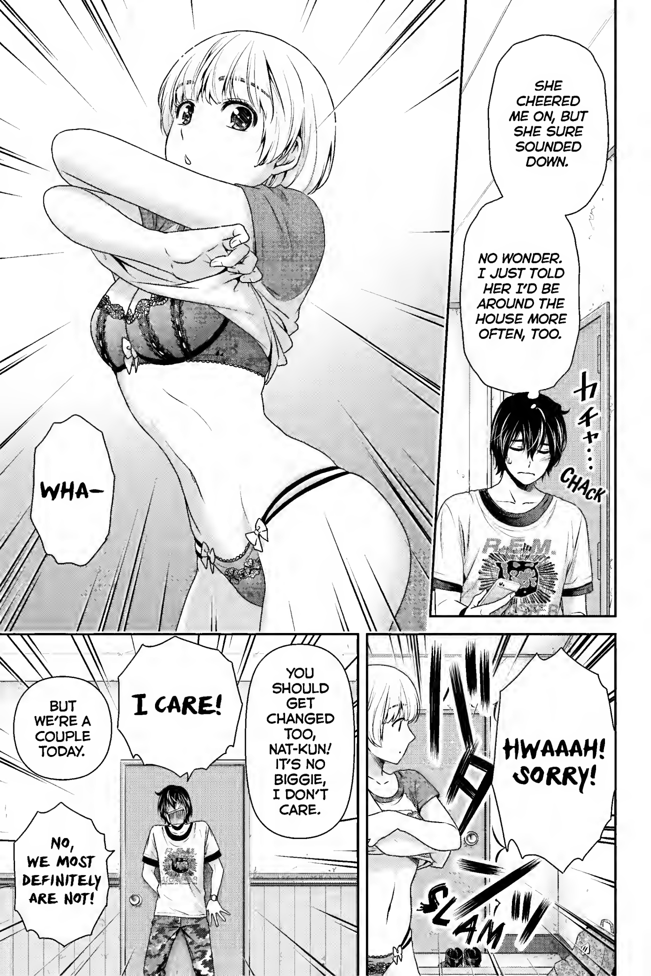

SHINKANSEN UNRESERVED SEAT SPECIAL-EXPRESS TICKET/ LIMITED-EXPRESS TICKET
TOK C
TOKYO • SHINAGAWA → ATAMI
Valid for the date of 7-1. Void on exit of ticket gate.
Changes in seat reservation will result in a ticket difference fee.
¥1.730
29.07.01 TokyoStation@ 42
19868-26(1-タ
ER...
KINDA OUT OF THE WAY, HUH?
I'D SAY IT'S RELATIVELY CLOSE.
FOR AN OVERNIGHT RESORT JOB, ANYWAY.
WHAT?!
YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT SPENDING THE NIGHT!
I JUST DID.
C'MON, NOW. MOVE THOSE FEET. OFF WE GO!
線の
Shinka
HUH?
HEY!
WHA-
HUUUUUUH?!

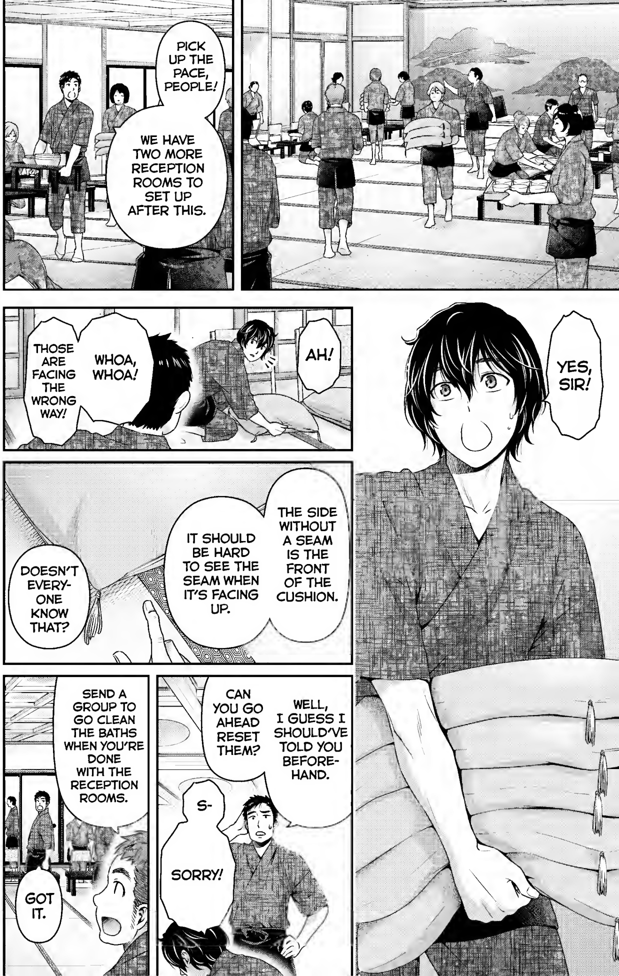
# CHAPTER 160: COMFORT TO THE TROUBLED

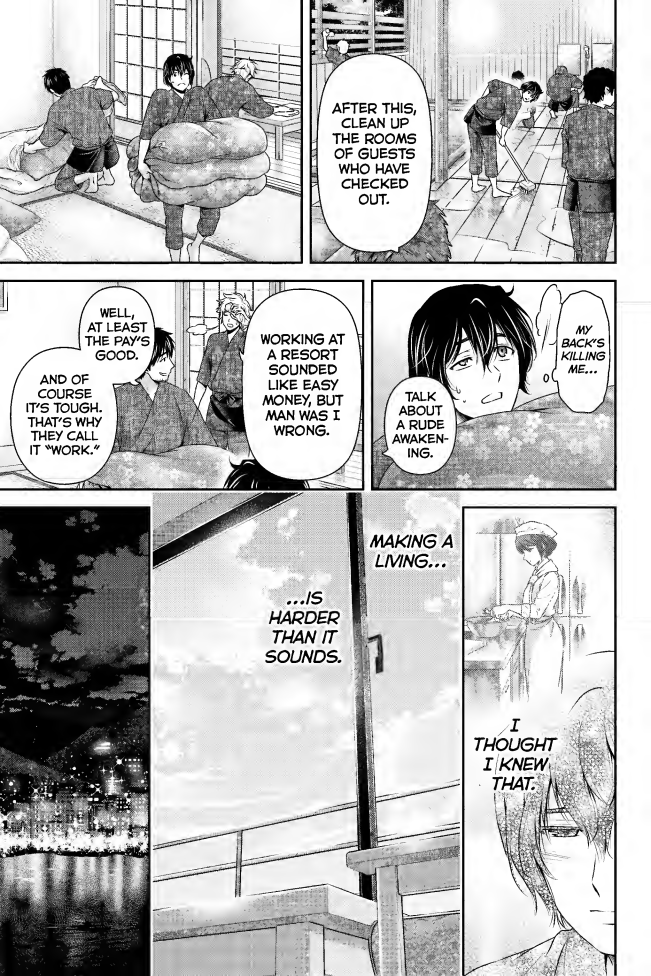

JR 熱海駅
Atami Station
THE BULK OF YOUR DUTIES WILL CONSIST OF WAITING AND BUSSING TABLES, MAKING FUTONS IN GUEST ROOMS, ET CETERA.
I'LL GO OVER THINGS IN DETAIL WHEN THE TIME COMES.
FOR NOW, PLEASE GO TO YOUR ROOMS, CHANGE INTO YOUR UNIFORMS, AND ASSEMBLE IN THE LOBBY.
YES, SIR!
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME...
...IT WAS AN OVERNIGHT GIG?

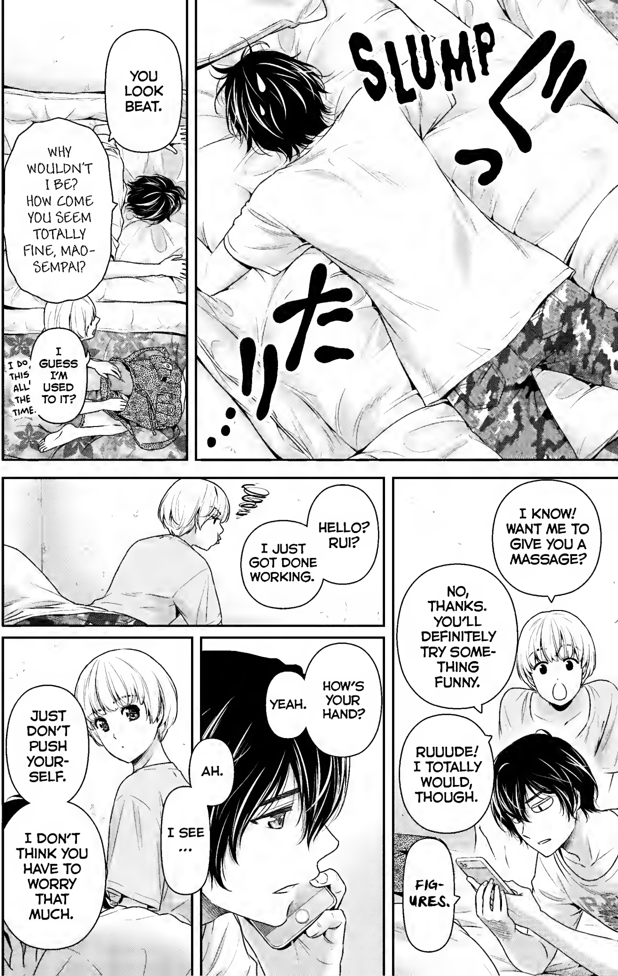

BECAUSE THEN YOU MIGHT'VE SAID NO!
THE AD SAID, "ROOM FOR TWO PROVIDED! COUPLES WELCOME!"
ER... CUP– YOU MEAN WE'RE GONNA SHARE A ROOM?!
UH-HUH.
WE CAN'T DO THAT! EVEN AS CLASSMATES, A GUY AND A GIRL SHARING A ROOM IS...
WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL? C'MON, WE HAVE WORK TO DO!
ガチャ
CHACK
IT'S A BOX!
CAN WE EVEN FIT TWO FUTONS IN HERE?
WANNA SHARE ONE?
NOT HAPPENING.
HUH?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, YOU WON'T BE HOME TONIGHT?

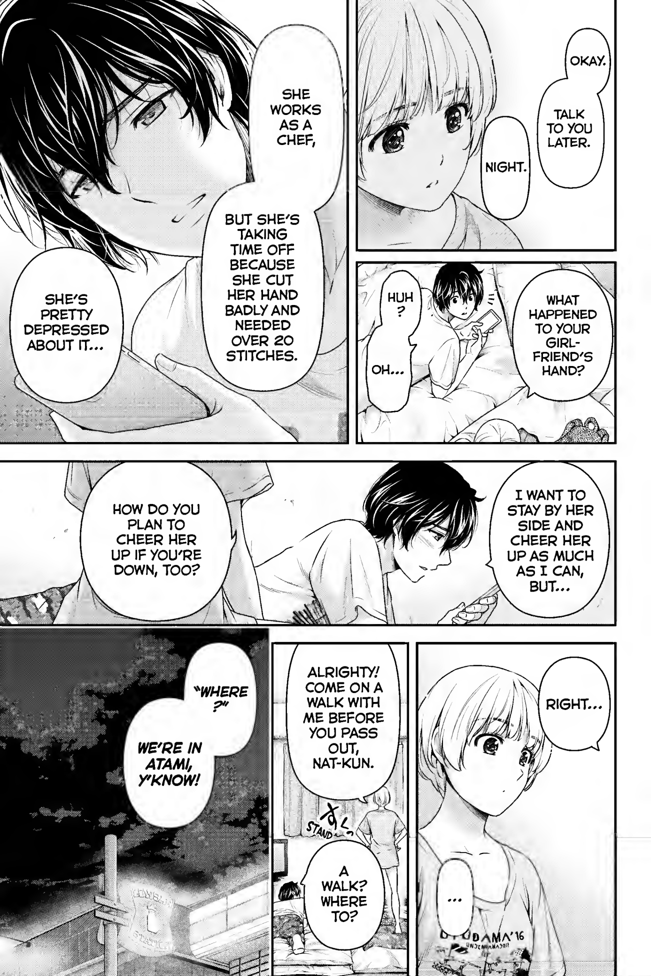

APPARENTLY, THIS JOB IS AN OVERNIGHT THING.
THE UPPERCLASSMAN WHO HOOKED ME UP WITH THE JOB BASICALLY KIDNAPPED ME.
NOW HERE I AM IN ATAMI.
ATAMI ?!
TURNS OUT IT WAS A JOB AT A HUGE HOTEL RESORT.
I GUESS THE PAY'S GOOD.
EVEN THOUGH THIS IS UNEXPECTED,
I'M SORRY I CAN'T BE THERE FOR YOU.
I KNOW YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A HARD TIME RIGHT NOW.
...IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.
DO YOUR BEST, OKAY?
...
BEEP ポッ
I WONDER IF HE'S WITH A BOY OR A GIRL...
もやっ
GLOOM
YOU MIGHT SCARE OFF YOUR BOYFRIEND IF YOU KEEP THAT UP.
GASP
WHIP WHIP WHIP
ぶんっ ぶん ぶん

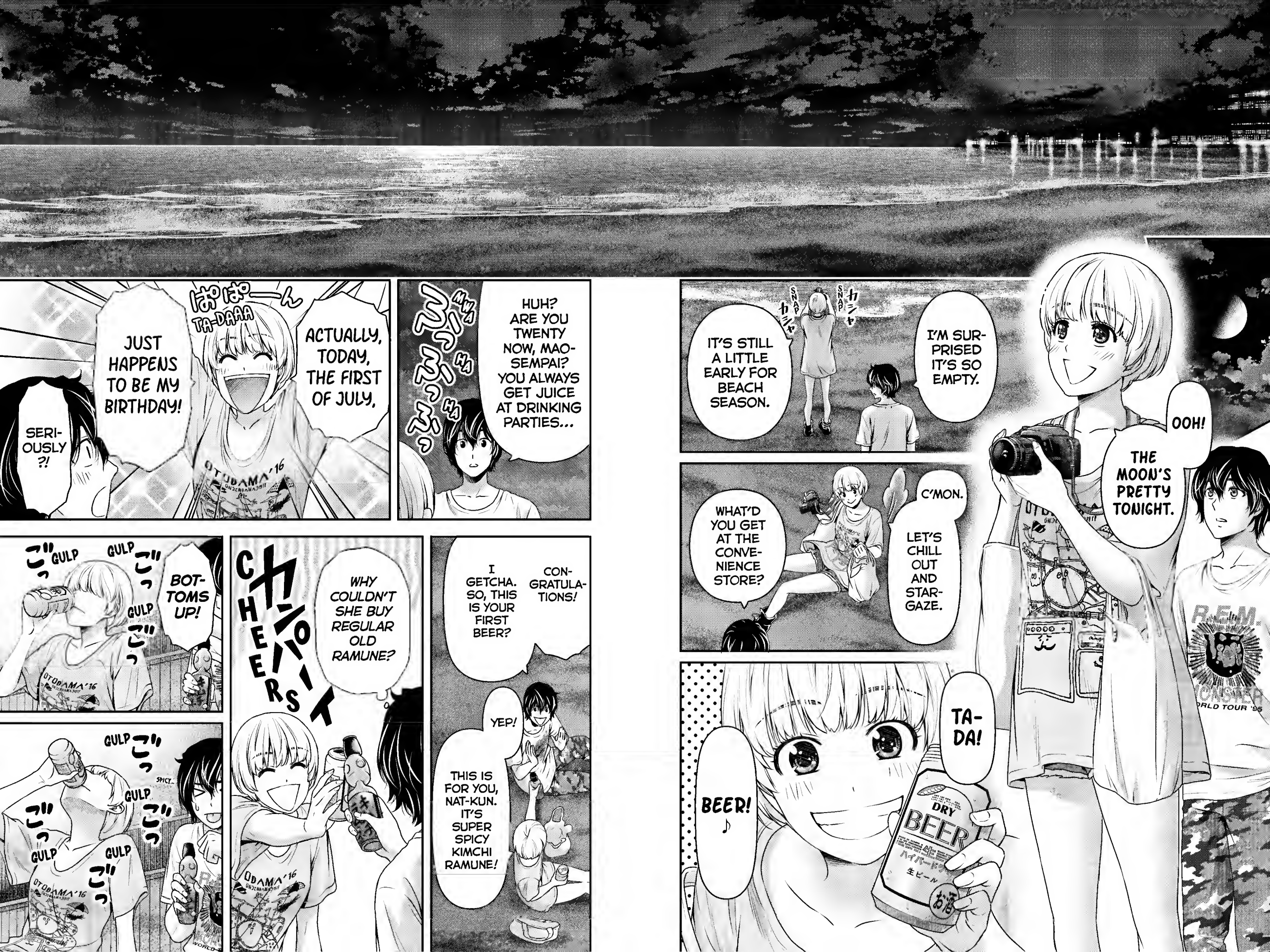

SHE CHEERED ME ON, BUT SHE SURE SOUNDED DOWN.
NO WONDER. I JUST TOLD HER I'D BE AROUND THE HOUSE MORE OFTEN, TOO.
カチャ…
CHACK
R.E.M.
WHA-
HWAAAH! SORRY!
SLAM
YOU SHOULD GET CHANGED TOO, NAT-KUN! IT'S NO BIGGIE, I DON'T CARE.
I CARE!
BUT WE'RE A COUPLE TODAY.
NO, WE MOST DEFINITELY ARE NOT!

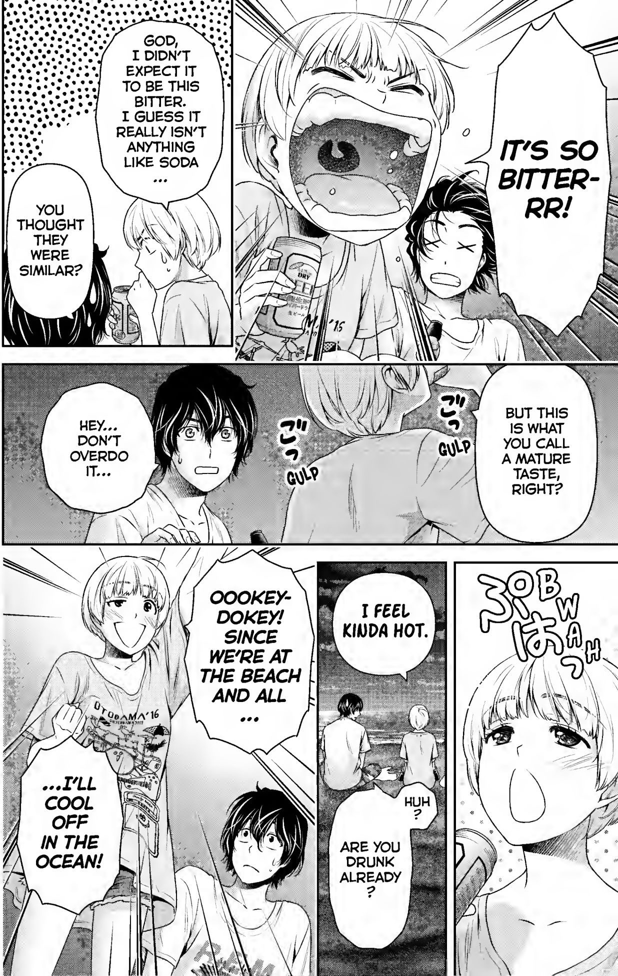

PICK UP THE PACE, PEOPLE!
WE HAVE TWO MORE RECEPTION ROOMS TO SET UP AFTER THIS.
YES, SIR!
AH!
WHOA, WHOA!
THOSE ARE FACING THE WRONG WAY!
THE SIDE WITHOUT A SEAM IS THE FRONT OF THE CUSHION.
IT SHOULD BE HARD TO SEE THE SEAM WHEN IT'S FACING UP.
DOESN'T EVERYONE KNOW THAT?
WELL, I GUESS I SHOULD'VE TOLD YOU BEFOREHAND.
CAN YOU GO AHEAD RESET THEM?
S-
SORRY!
SEND A GROUP TO GO CLEAN THE BATHS WHEN YOU'RE DONE WITH THE RECEPTION ROOMS.
GOT IT.

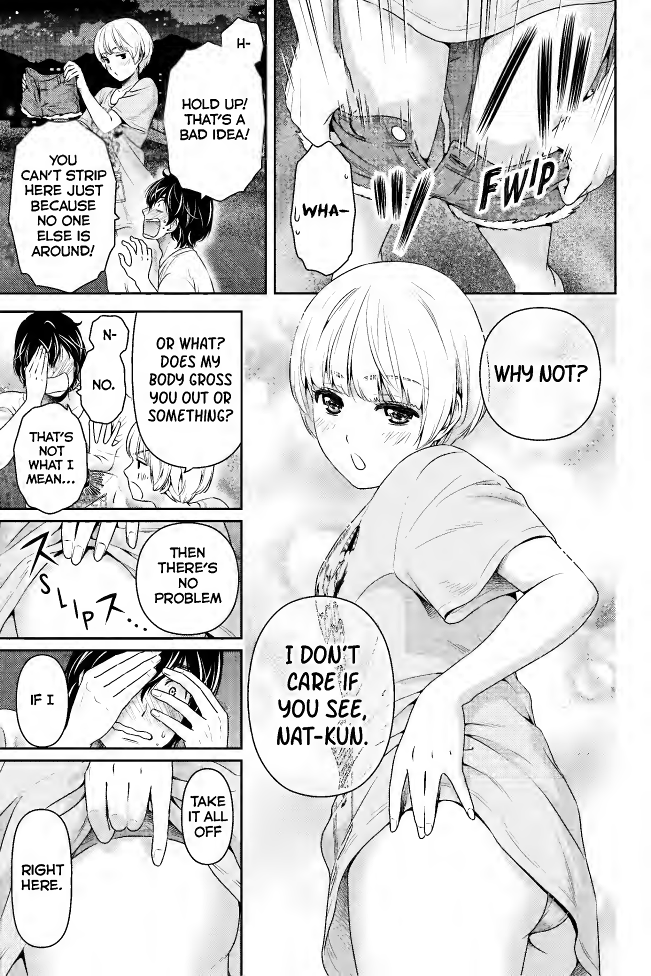

AFTER THIS, CLEAN UP THE ROOMS OF GUESTS WHO HAVE CHECKED OUT.
MY BACK'S KILLING ME...
TALK ABOUT A RUDE AWAKENING.
WORKING AT A RESORT SOUNDED LIKE EASY MONEY, BUT MAN WAS I WRONG.
WELL, AT LEAST THE PAY'S GOOD.
AND OF COURSE IT'S TOUGH. THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT "WORK."
MAKING A LIVING...
...IS HARDER THAN IT SOUNDS.
I THOUGHT I KNEW THAT.

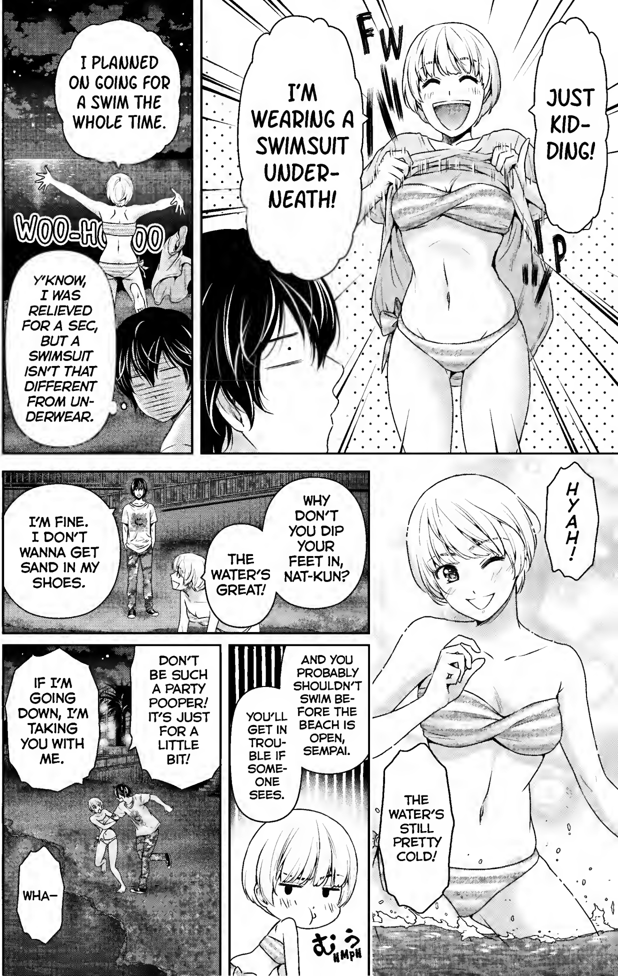

SLUMP
ぐっ
たり
...
YOU LOOK BEAT.
WHY WOULDN'T I BE? HOW COME YOU SEEM TOTALLY FINE, MAO-SEMPAI?
I GUESS I'M USED TO IT?
I DO THIS ALL THE TIME.
I KNOW! WANT ME TO GIVE YOU A MASSAGE?
NO, THANKS. YOU'LL DEFINITELY TRY SOMETHING FUNNY.
RUUUDE! I TOTALLY WOULD, THOUGH.
FIGURES.
HELLO? RUI?
I JUST GOT DONE WORKING.
HOW'S YOUR HAND?
YEAH.
AH.
I SEE...
JUST DON'T PUSH YOURSELF.
I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TO WORRY THAT MUCH.

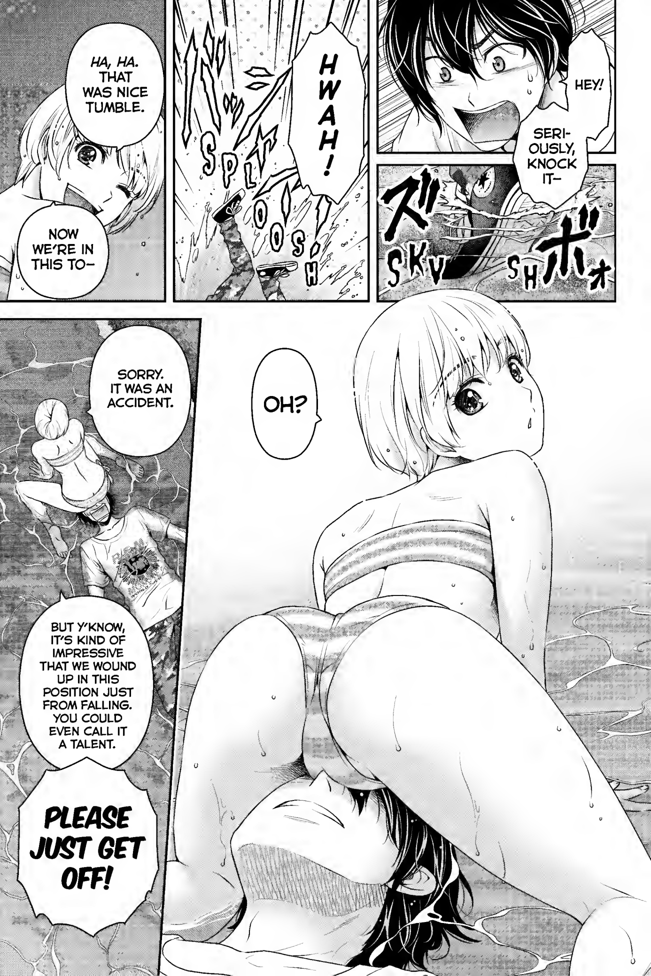

OKAY.
TALK TO YOU LATER.
NIGHT.
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR GIRLFRIEND'S HAND?
HUH?
OH...
SHE WORKS AS A CHEF,
BUT SHE'S TAKING TIME OFF BECAUSE SHE CUT HER HAND BADLY AND NEEDED OVER 20 STITCHES.
SHE'S PRETTY DEPRESSED ABOUT IT...
I WANT TO STAY BY HER SIDE AND CHEER HER UP AS MUCH AS I CAN, BUT...
HOW DO YOU PLAN TO CHEER HER UP IF YOU'RE DOWN, TOO?
RIGHT...
...
ALRIGHTY! COME ON A WALK WITH ME BEFORE YOU PASS OUT, NAT-KUN.
すっ STAND
A WALK? WHERE TO?
"WHERE?"
WE'RE IN ATAMI, Y'KNOW!
LAWSON STATION
DODAMA'16

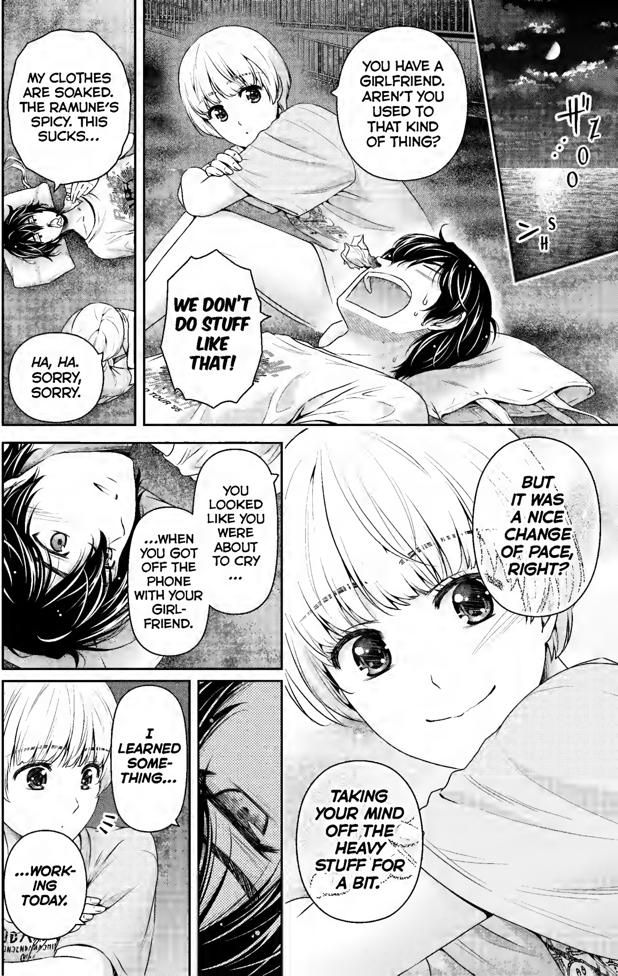

OOH!
THE MOON'S PRETTY TONIGHT.
R.E.M. MONSTER WORLD TOUR '95
カシャ SNAP
カシャ SNAP
I'M SURPRISED IT'S SO EMPTY.
IT'S STILL A LITTLE EARLY FOR BEACH SEASON.
C'MON.
LET'S CHILL OUT AND STARGAZE.
WHAT'D YOU GET AT THE CONVENIENCE STORE?
TA-DA!
BEER! ♪
DRY BEER
生ビール
お酒
HUH? ARE YOU TWENTY NOW, MAO-SEMPAI? YOU ALWAYS GET JUICE AT DRINKING PARTIES...
ふっふっふっ MWA HA HA HA
ぱぱーん TA-DAAA
ACTUALLY, TODAY, THE FIRST OF JULY,
JUST HAPPENS TO BE MY BIRTHDAY!
SERIOUSLY?!
OTODAMA'16
CONGRATULATIONS!
I GETCHA. SO, THIS IS YOUR FIRST BEER?
YEP!
THIS IS FOR YOU, NAT-KUN. IT'S SUPER SPICY KIMCHI RAMUNE!
カンパーイ CHEERS
WHY COULDN'T SHE BUY REGULAR OLD RAMUNE?
BOTTOMS UP!
ごっ GULP
ごっ GULP
ごっ GULP
ごっ GULP
ごっ GULP
SPICY...
ごっ GULP
ごっ GULP

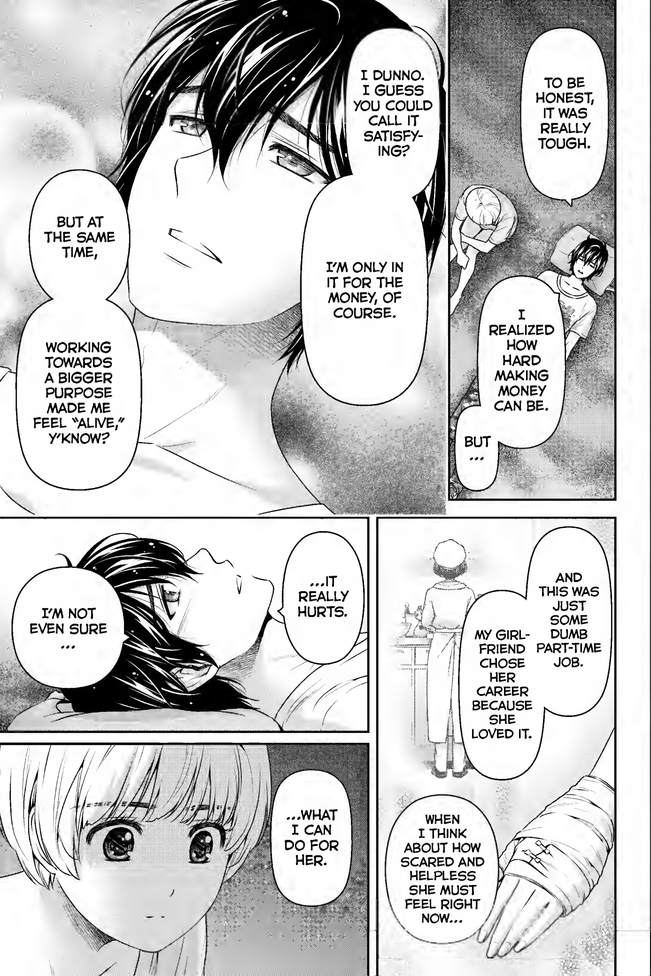

IT'S SO BITTER-RR!
GOD, I DIDN'T EXPECT IT TO BE THIS BITTER. I GUESS IT REALLY ISN'T ANYTHING LIKE SODA...
YOU THOUGHT THEY WERE SIMILAR?
ごっ GULP
BUT THIS IS WHAT YOU CALL A MATURE TASTE, RIGHT?
ごっ GULP
HEY... DON'T OVERDO IT...
ぷはっ PBWAH
I FEEL KINDA HOT.
HUH?
ARE YOU DRUNK ALREADY?
OOOKEY-DOKEY! SINCE WE'RE AT THE BEACH AND ALL...
...I'LL COOL OFF IN THE OCEAN!
OTODAMA'16

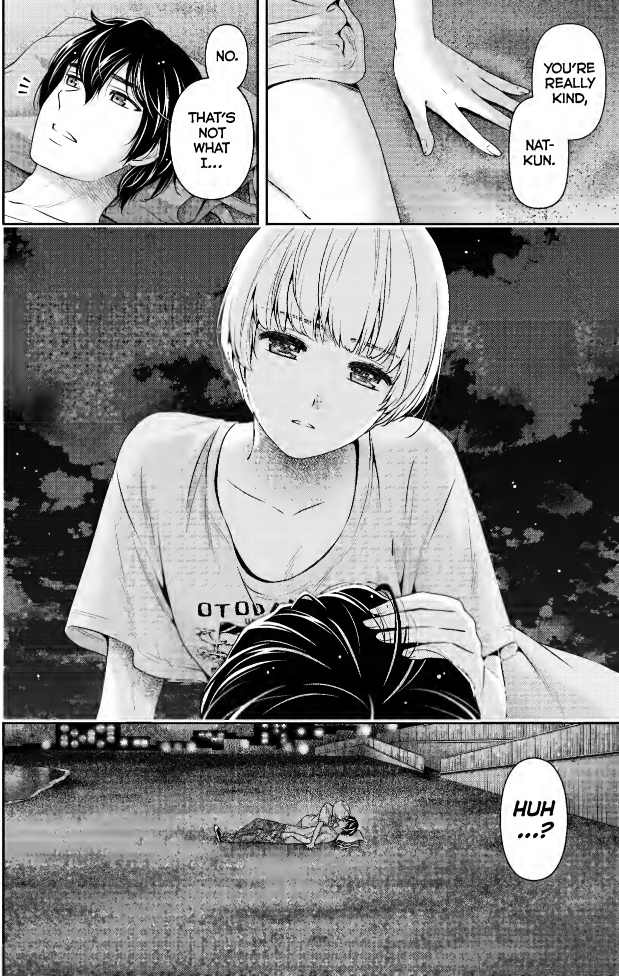

FWIP
WHA-
H-
HOLD UP! THAT'S A BAD IDEA!
YOU CAN'T STRIP HERE JUST BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE IS AROUND!
WHY NOT?
I DON'T CARE IF YOU SEE, NAT-KUN.
OR WHAT? DOES MY BODY GROSS YOU OUT OR SOMETHING?
N-
NO.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN...
THEN THERE'S NO PROBLEM
SLIP...
IF I
TAKE IT ALL OFF
RIGHT HERE.


JUST KID-DING!
FWIP
I'M WEARING A SWIMSUIT UNDER-NEATH!
I PLANNED ON GOING FOR A SWIM THE WHOLE TIME.
WOO-HOOO
Y'KNOW, I WAS RELIEVED FOR A SEC, BUT A SWIMSUIT ISN'T THAT DIFFERENT FROM UN-DERWEAR.
HYAH!
THE WATER'S STILL PRETTY COLD!
WHY DON'T YOU DIP YOUR FEET IN, NAT-KUN?
THE WATER'S GREAT!
I'M FINE. I DON'T WANNA GET SAND IN MY SHOES.
AND YOU PROBABLY SHOULDN'T SWIM BE-FORE THE BEACH IS OPEN, SEMPAI.
YOU'LL GET IN TROU-BLE IF SOME-ONE SEES.
むう HMPH
DON'T BE SUCH A PARTY POOPER! IT'S JUST FOR A LITTLE BIT!
IF I'M GOING DOWN, I'M TAKING YOU WITH ME.
WHA-


HEY!
SERI-OUSLY, KNOCK IT—
ズ SKV
ボォ SH
HWAH!
バッ SPLOOSH
*HA, HA.* THAT WAS NICE TUMBLE.
NOW WE'RE IN THIS TO—
OH?
SORRY. IT WAS AN ACCIDENT.
BUT Y'KNOW, IT'S KIND OF IMPRESSIVE THAT WE WOUND UP IN THIS POSITION JUST FROM FALLING. YOU COULD EVEN CALL IT A TALENT.
PLEASE JUST GET OFF!

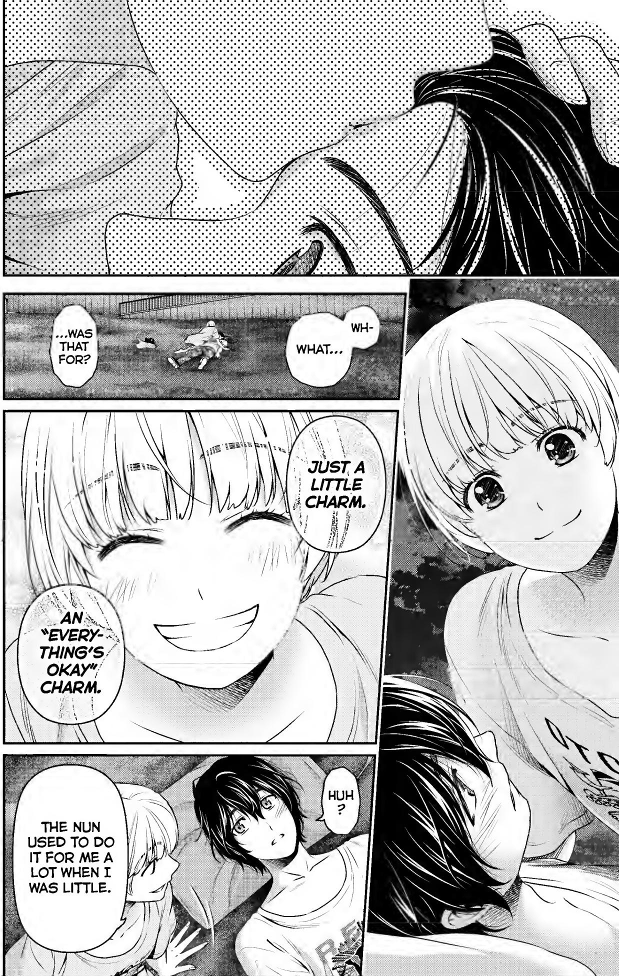

ZOO...
SHH
YOU HAVE A GIRLFRIEND. AREN'T YOU USED TO THAT KIND OF THING?
WE DON'T DO STUFF LIKE THAT!
MY CLOTHES ARE SOAKED. THE RAMUNE'S SPICY. THIS SUCKS...
HA, HA. SORRY, SORRY.
BUT IT WAS A NICE CHANGE OF PACE, RIGHT?
TAKING YOUR MIND OFF THE HEAVY STUFF FOR A BIT.
YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU WERE ABOUT TO CRY...
...WHEN YOU GOT OFF THE PHONE WITH YOUR GIRLFRIEND.
I LEARNED SOMETHING...
...WORKING TODAY.

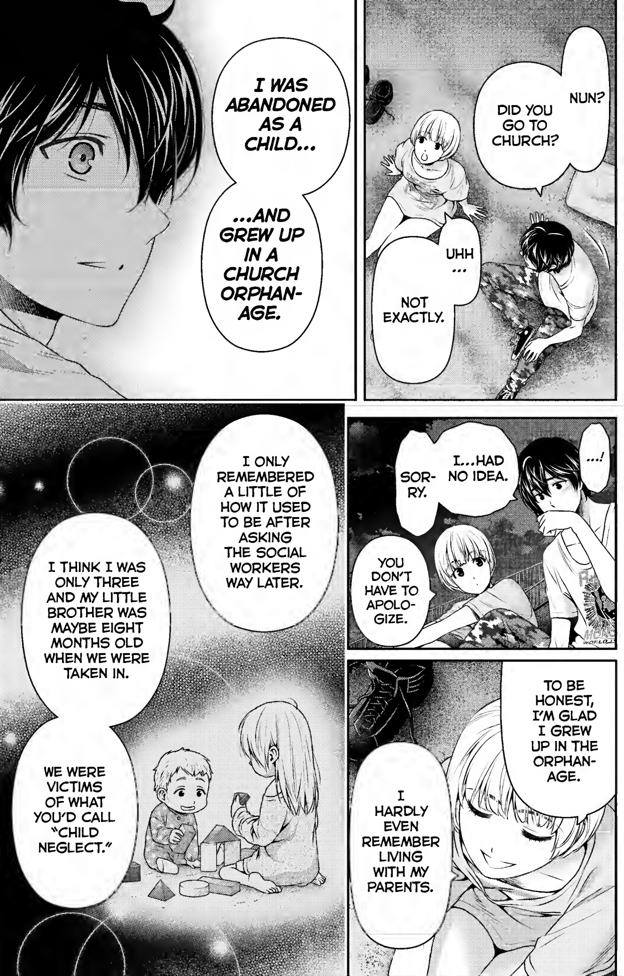

TO BE HONEST, IT WAS REALLY TOUGH.
I REALIZED HOW HARD MAKING MONEY CAN BE.
BUT ...
I DUNNO. I GUESS YOU COULD CALL IT SATISFYING?
I'M ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY, OF COURSE.
BUT AT THE SAME TIME,
WORKING TOWARDS A BIGGER PURPOSE MADE ME FEEL "ALIVE," Y'KNOW?
AND THIS WAS JUST SOME DUMB PART-TIME JOB.
MY GIRLFRIEND CHOSE HER CAREER BECAUSE SHE LOVED IT.
WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW SCARED AND HELPLESS SHE MUST FEEL RIGHT NOW...
...IT REALLY HURTS.
I'M NOT EVEN SURE ...
...WHAT I CAN DO FOR HER.

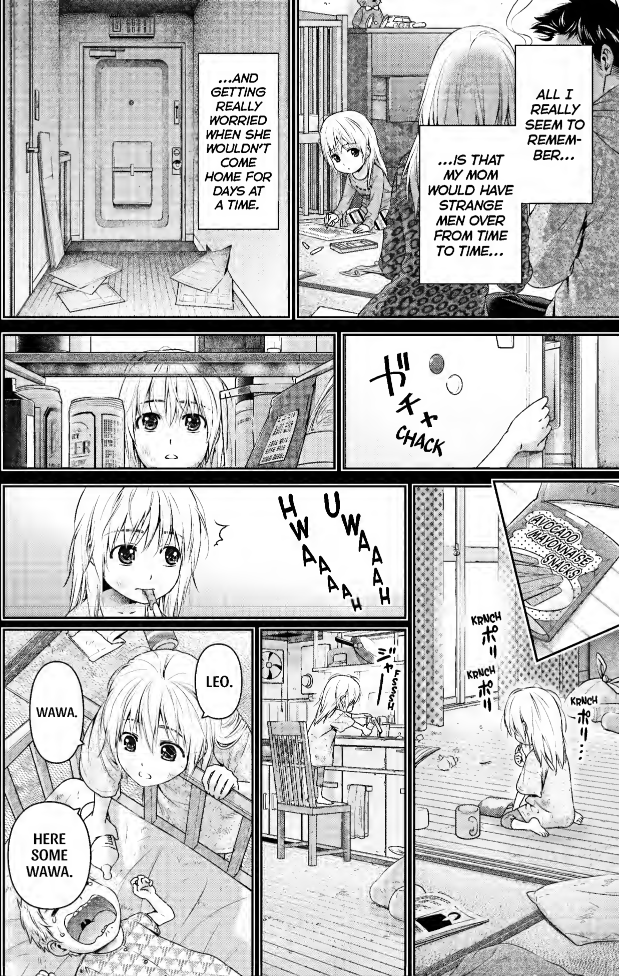

YOU'RE REALLY KIND,
NAT-KUN.
NO.
THAT'S NOT WHAT I...
OTODA
HUH ...?

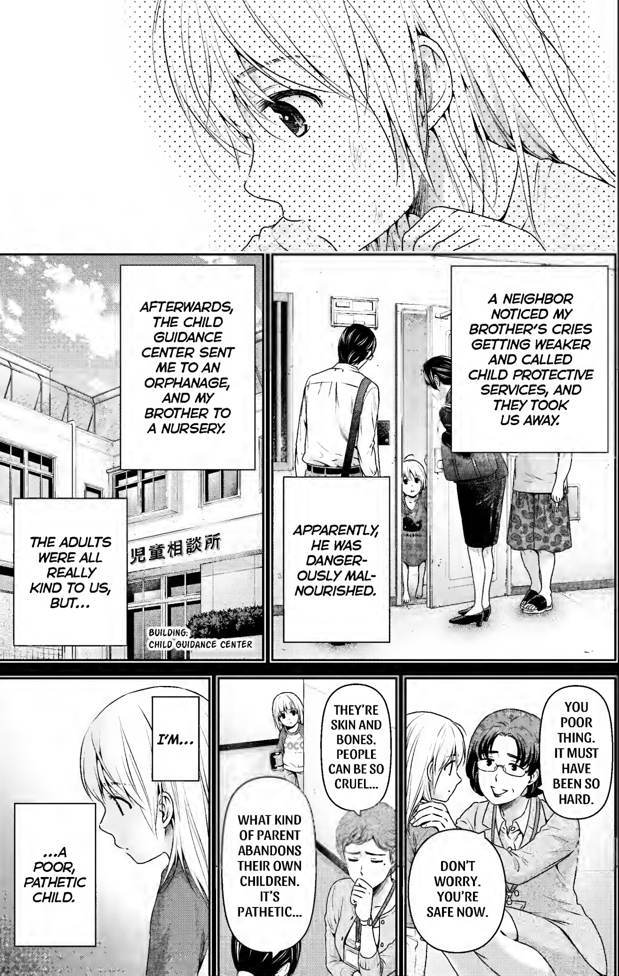
# CHAPTER 161:
# THE DEFINITION OF HAPPINESS

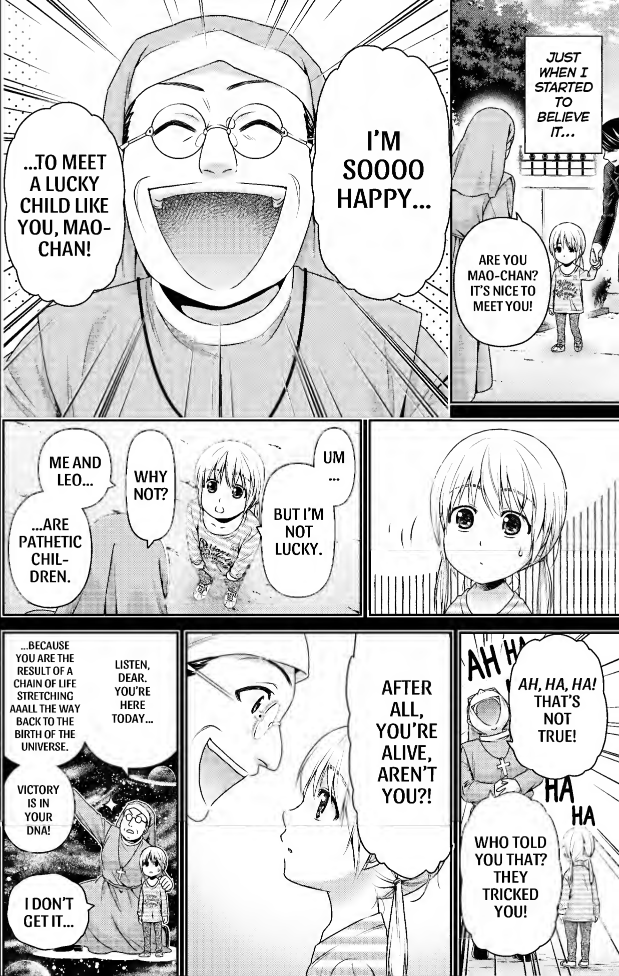
NSTER
RLD TOUR '95

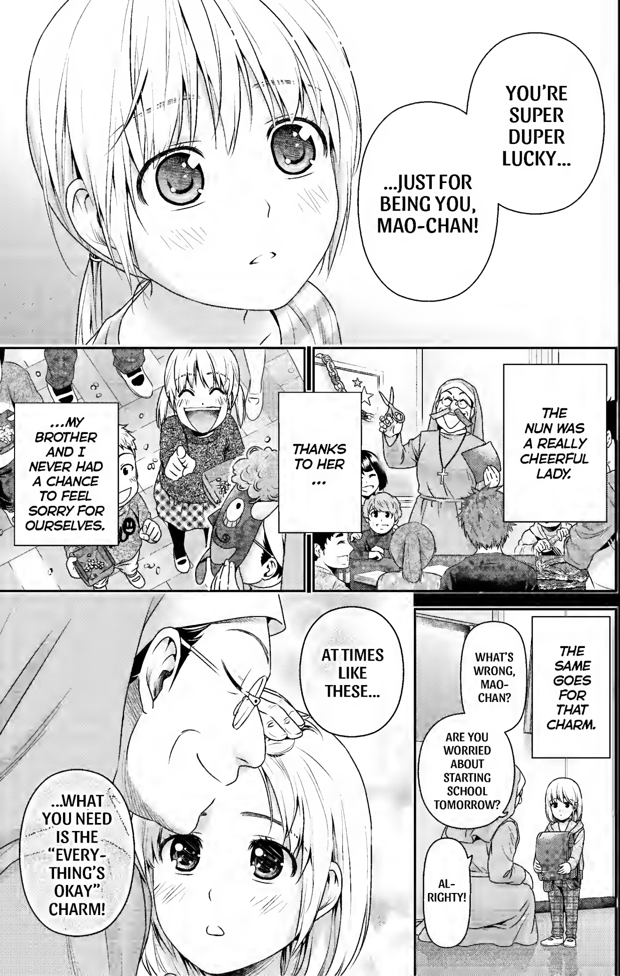

WH- WHAT...
...WAS THAT FOR?
JUST A LITTLE CHARM.
AN "EVERYTHING'S OKAY" CHARM.
HUH?
THE NUN USED TO DO IT FOR ME A LOT WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

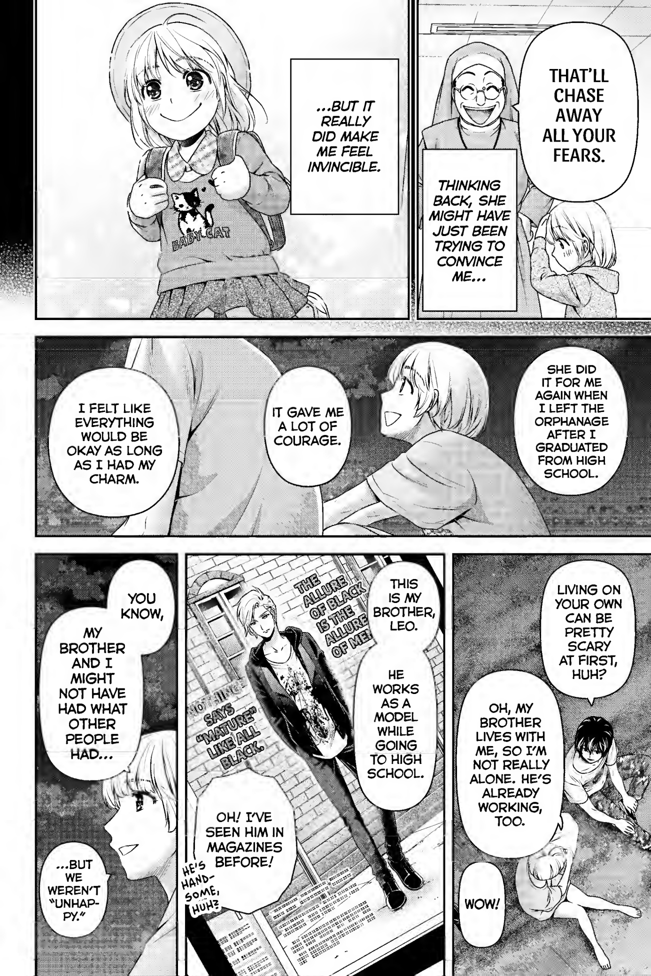

NUN? DID YOU GO TO CHURCH?
UHH... NOT EXACTLY.
*I WAS ABANDONED AS A CHILD...*
*...AND GREW UP IN A CHURCH ORPHANAGE.*
...!
I...HAD NO IDEA. SORRY.
YOU DON'T HAVE TO APOLOGIZE.
TO BE HONEST, I'M GLAD I GREW UP IN THE ORPHANAGE.
I HARDLY EVEN REMEMBER LIVING WITH MY PARENTS.
I ONLY REMEMBERED A LITTLE OF HOW IT USED TO BE AFTER ASKING THE SOCIAL WORKERS WAY LATER.
I THINK I WAS ONLY THREE AND MY LITTLE BROTHER WAS MAYBE EIGHT MONTHS OLD WHEN WE WERE TAKEN IN.
WE WERE VICTIMS OF WHAT YOU'D CALL "CHILD NEGLECT."

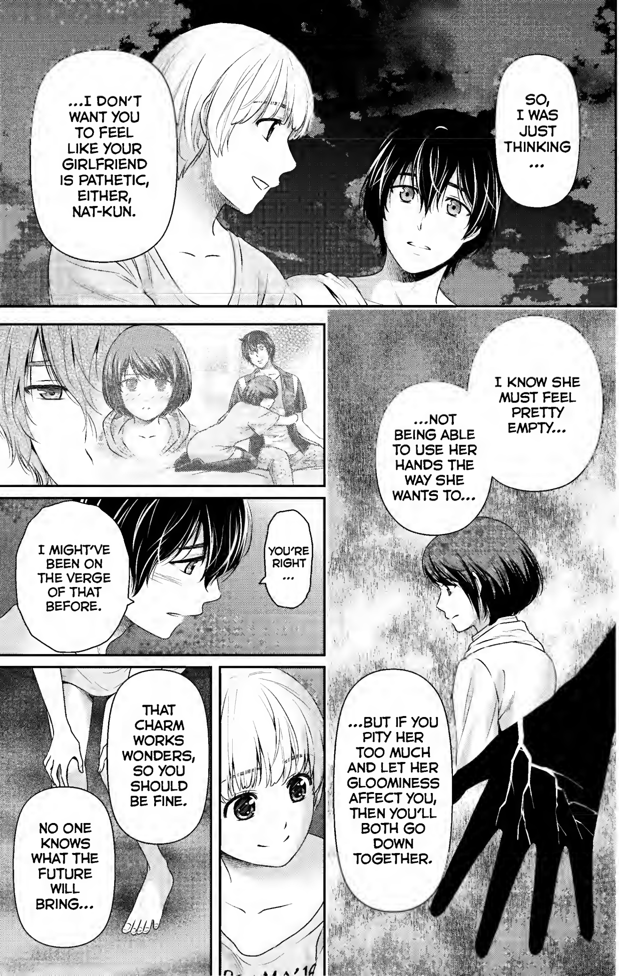

ALL I REALLY SEEM TO REMEMBER...
...IS THAT MY MOM WOULD HAVE STRANGE MEN OVER FROM TIME TO TIME...
...AND GETTING REALLY WORRIED WHEN SHE WOULDN'T COME HOME FOR DAYS AT A TIME.
ガチャ
CHACK
AVOCADO MAYONNAISE SNACKS
KRNCH ポリ
KRNCH ポリ
KRNCH ポリ...
UWAAAAH
HWAAAAAH
ジャー
FSSSSH
LEO.
WAWA.
HERE SOME WAWA.

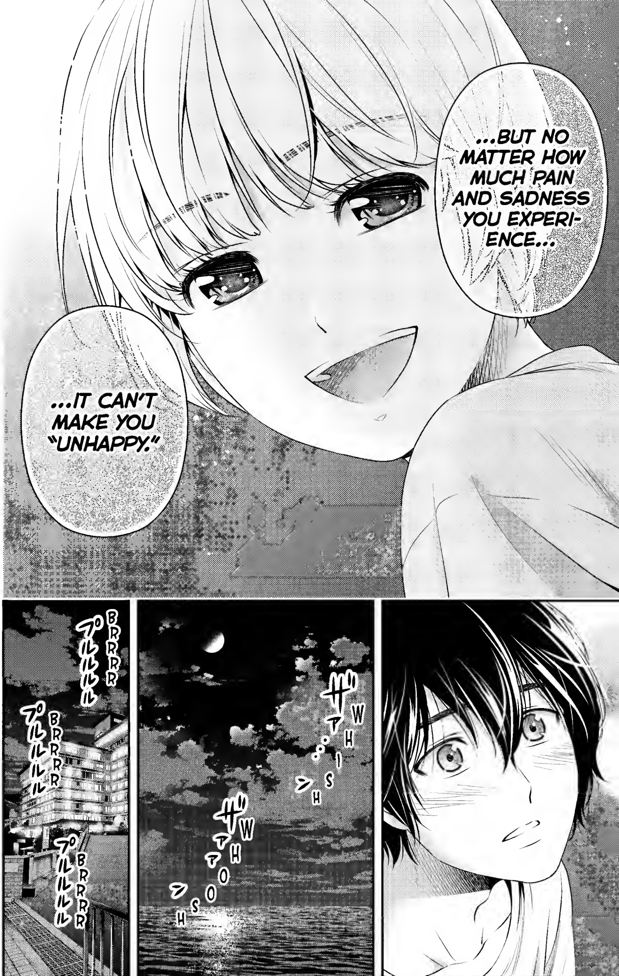

A NEIGHBOR NOTICED MY BROTHER'S CRIES GETTING WEAKER AND CALLED CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES, AND THEY TOOK US AWAY.
APPARENTLY, HE WAS DANGEROUSLY MALNOURISHED.
AFTERWARDS, THE CHILD GUIDANCE CENTER SENT ME TO AN ORPHANAGE, AND MY BROTHER TO A NURSERY.
THE ADULTS WERE ALL REALLY KIND TO US, BUT...
児童相談所
BUILDING: CHILD GUIDANCE CENTER
YOU POOR THING. IT MUST HAVE BEEN SO HARD.
DON'T WORRY. YOU'RE SAFE NOW.
THEY'RE SKIN AND BONES. PEOPLE CAN BE SO CRUEL...
WHAT KIND OF PARENT ABANDONS THEIR OWN CHILDREN. IT'S PATHETIC...
I'M...
...A POOR, PATHETIC CHILD.

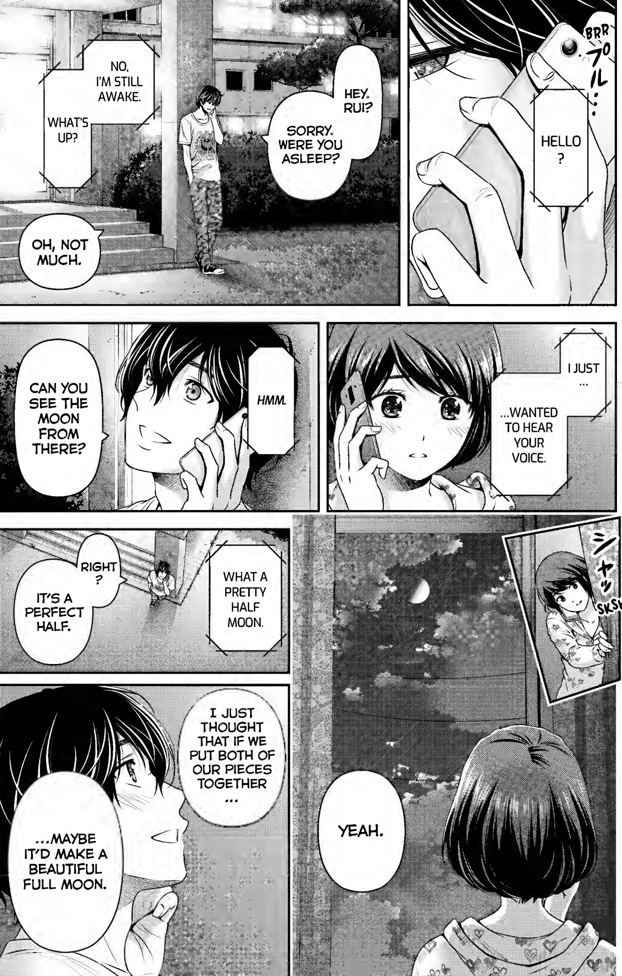

JUST WHEN I STARTED TO BELIEVE IT...
ARE YOU MAO-CHAN? IT'S NICE TO MEET YOU!
I'M SOOOO HAPPY...
...TO MEET A LUCKY CHILD LIKE YOU, MAO-CHAN!
UM...
BUT I'M NOT LUCKY.
WHY NOT?
ME AND LEO...
...ARE PATHETIC CHILDREN.
AH HA HA HA
AH, HA, HA! THAT'S NOT TRUE!
WHO TOLD YOU THAT? THEY TRICKED YOU!
AFTER ALL, YOU'RE ALIVE, AREN'T YOU?!
LISTEN, DEAR. YOU'RE HERE TODAY...
...BECAUSE YOU ARE THE RESULT OF A CHAIN OF LIFE STRETCHING AAALL THE WAY BACK TO THE BIRTH OF THE UNIVERSE.
VICTORY IS IN YOUR DNA!
I DON'T GET IT...

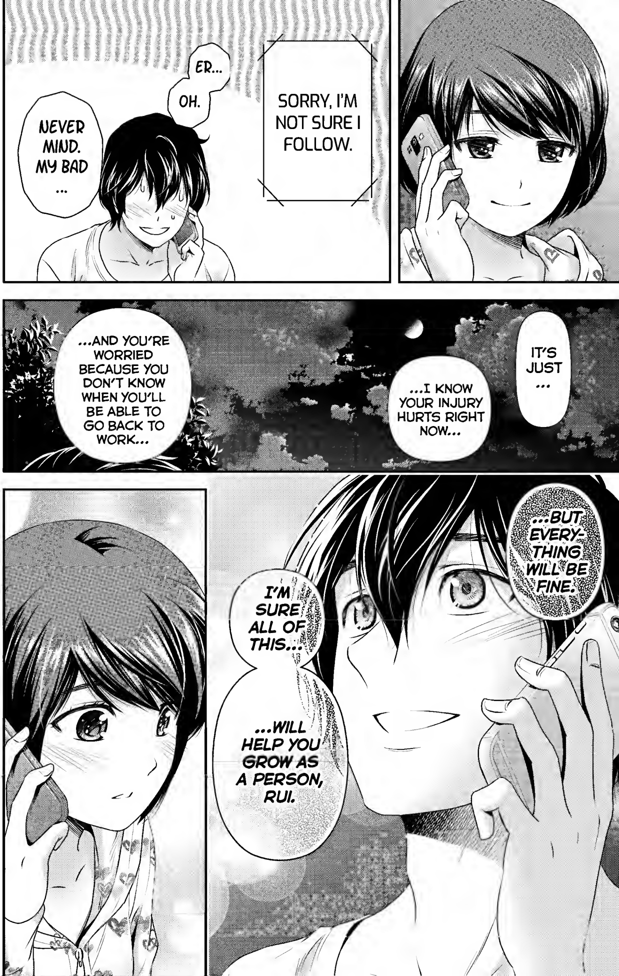

YOU'RE SUPER DUPER LUCKY...
...JUST FOR BEING YOU, MAO-CHAN!
THE NUN WAS A REALLY CHEERFUL LADY.
THANKS TO HER ...
...MY BROTHER AND I NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO FEEL SORRY FOR OURSELVES.
THE SAME GOES FOR THAT CHARM.
WHAT'S WRONG, MAO-CHAN?
ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT STARTING SCHOOL TOMORROW?
ALRIGHTY!
AT TIMES LIKE THESE...
...WHAT YOU NEED IS THE "EVERYTHING'S OKAY" CHARM!


THAT'LL CHASE AWAY ALL YOUR FEARS.
THINKING BACK, SHE MIGHT HAVE JUST BEEN TRYING TO CONVINCE ME...
...BUT IT REALLY DID MAKE ME FEEL INVINCIBLE.
BABY CAT
SHE DID IT FOR ME AGAIN WHEN I LEFT THE ORPHANAGE AFTER I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL.
IT GAVE ME A LOT OF COURAGE.
I FELT LIKE EVERYTHING WOULD BE OKAY AS LONG AS I HAD MY CHARM.
LIVING ON YOUR OWN CAN BE PRETTY SCARY AT FIRST, HUH?
OH, MY BROTHER LIVES WITH ME, SO I'M NOT REALLY ALONE. HE'S ALREADY WORKING, TOO.
WOW!
THIS IS MY BROTHER, LEO.
HE WORKS AS A MODEL WHILE GOING TO HIGH SCHOOL.
THE ALLURE OF BLACK IS THE ALLURE OF ME!
NOTHING SAYS "MATURE" LIKE ALL BLACK.
OH! I'VE SEEN HIM IN MAGAZINES BEFORE!
HE'S HANDSOME, HUH?
YOU KNOW, MY BROTHER AND I MIGHT NOT HAVE HAD WHAT OTHER PEOPLE HAD...
...BUT WE WEREN'T "UNHAPPY."

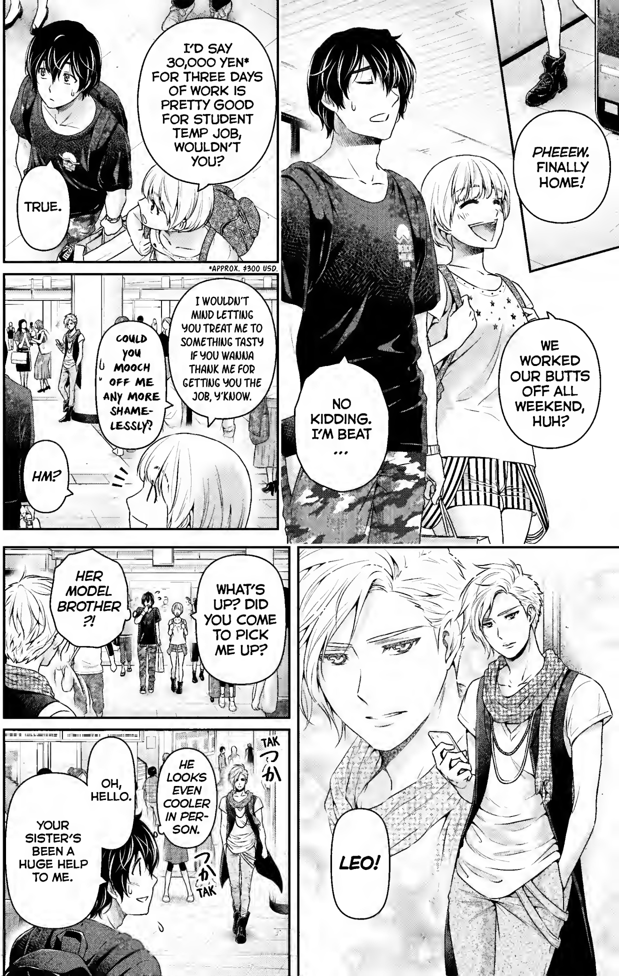

SO, I WAS JUST THINKING...
...I DON'T WANT YOU TO FEEL LIKE YOUR GIRLFRIEND IS PATHETIC, EITHER, NAT-KUN.
I KNOW SHE MUST FEEL PRETTY EMPTY...
...NOT BEING ABLE TO USE HER HANDS THE WAY SHE WANTS TO...
...BUT IF YOU PITY HER TOO MUCH AND LET HER GLOOMINESS AFFECT YOU, THEN YOU'LL BOTH GO DOWN TOGETHER.
YOU'RE RIGHT...
I MIGHT'VE BEEN ON THE VERGE OF THAT BEFORE.
THAT CHARM WORKS WONDERS, SO YOU SHOULD BE FINE.
NO ONE KNOWS WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BRING...


...BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH PAIN AND SADNESS YOU EXPERIENCE...
...IT CAN'T MAKE YOU "UNHAPPY."
ザパ…ッ WHISH
ザパァァッ WHOOSH
プルルル BRRRR
プルルル BRRRR
プルルル BRRRR

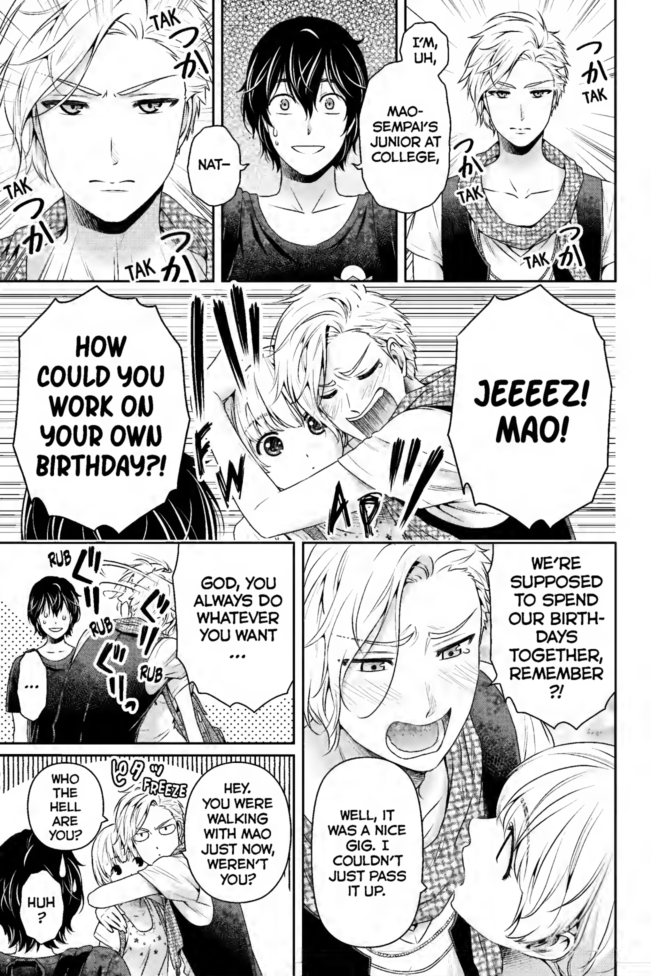

BRR
プル…
HELLO?
HEY. RUI?
SORRY. WERE YOU ASLEEP?
NO, I'M STILL AWAKE.
WHAT'S UP?
OH, NOT MUCH.
I JUST ...
...WANTED TO HEAR YOUR VOICE.
HMM.
CAN YOU SEE THE MOON FROM THERE?
シャッ
SKSH
WHAT A PRETTY HALF MOON.
RIGHT?
IT'S A PERFECT HALF.
I JUST THOUGHT THAT IF WE PUT BOTH OF OUR PIECES TOGETHER ...
...MAYBE IT'D MAKE A BEAUTIFUL FULL MOON.
YEAH.

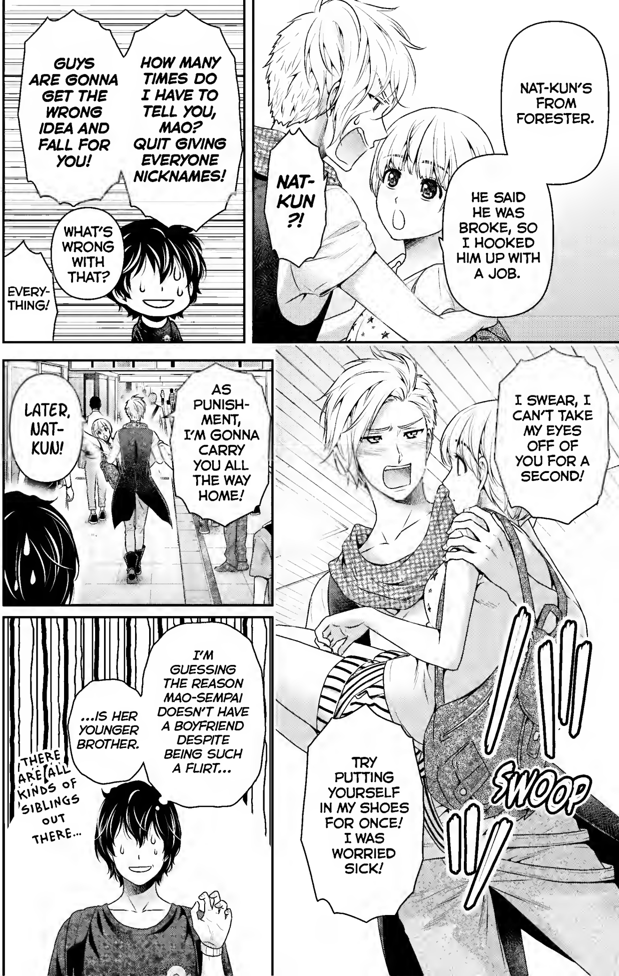

SORRY, I'M NOT SURE I FOLLOW.
ER...
OH.
NEVER MIND. MY BAD ...
IT'S JUST ...
...I KNOW YOUR INJURY HURTS RIGHT NOW...
...AND YOU'RE WORRIED BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW WHEN YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO WORK...
...BUT EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE.
I'M SURE ALL OF THIS...
...WILL HELP YOU GROW AS A PERSON, RUI.

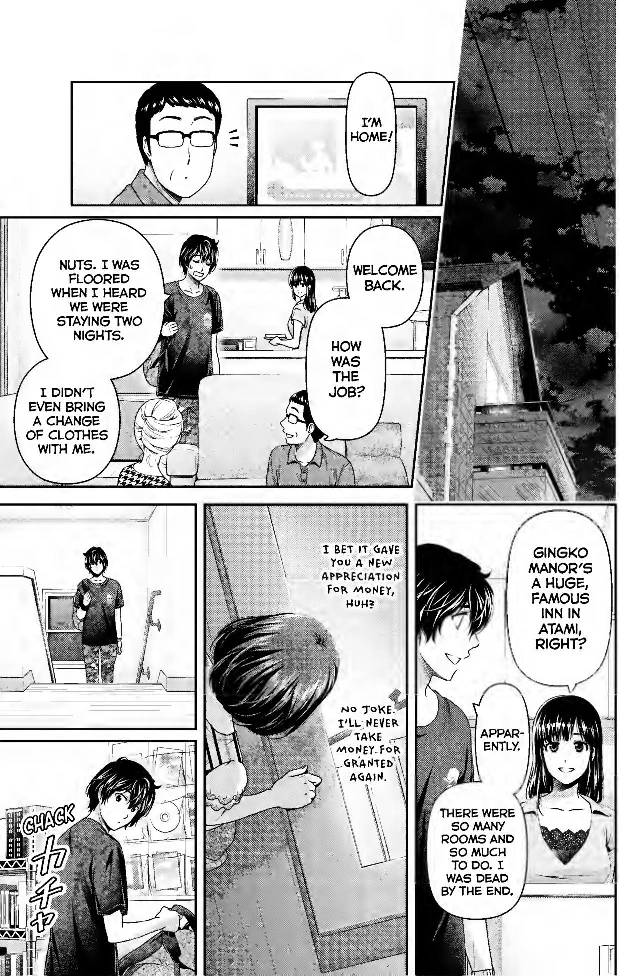
YEAH ....!

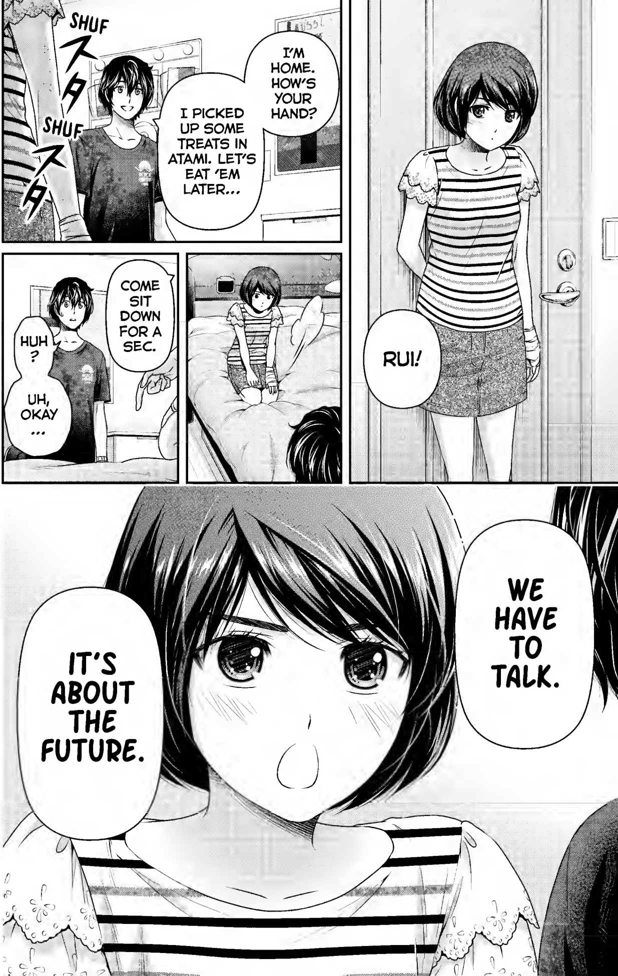

PHEEEW. FINALLY HOME!
WE WORKED OUR BUTTS OFF ALL WEEKEND, HUH?
NO KIDDING. I'M BEAT ...
I'D SAY 30,000 YEN* FOR THREE DAYS OF WORK IS PRETTY GOOD FOR STUDENT TEMP JOB, WOULDN'T YOU?
TRUE.
I WOULDN'T MIND LETTING YOU TREAT ME TO SOMETHING TASTY IF YOU WANNA THANK ME FOR GETTING YOU THE JOB, Y'KNOW.
COULD YOU MOOCH OFF ME ANY MORE SHAMELESSLY?
HM?
LEO!
WHAT'S UP? DID YOU COME TO PICK ME UP?
HER MODEL BROTHER?!
TAK つか
HE LOOKS EVEN COOLER IN PERSON.
つか TAK
OH, HELLO.
YOUR SISTER'S BEEN A HUGE HELP TO ME.

*APPROX. $300 USD.

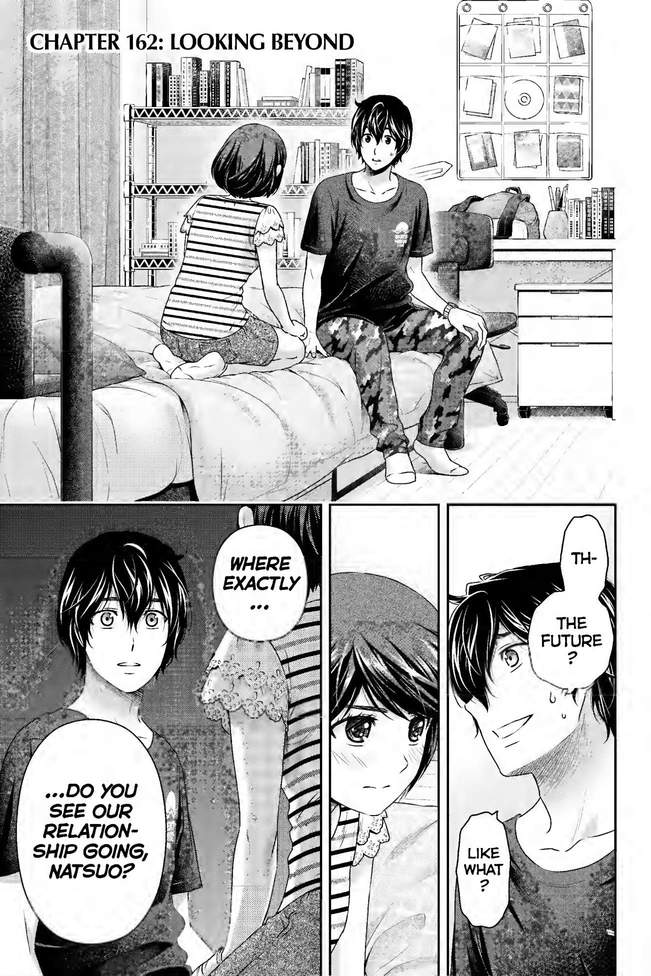

つか TAK
つか TAK
I'M, UH,
MAO-SEMPAI'S JUNIOR AT COLLEGE,
NAT–
TAK つか
TAK つか
TAK つか
JEEEEZ! MAO!
FWAP
HOW COULD YOU WORK ON YOUR OWN BIRTHDAY?!
RUB ぐり
RUB ぐり
RUB ぐりっ
GOD, YOU ALWAYS DO WHATEVER YOU WANT...
...
WE'RE SUPPOSED TO SPEND OUR BIRTHDAYS TOGETHER, REMEMBER?!
WELL, IT WAS A NICE GIG. I COULDN'T JUST PASS IT UP.
ピタッ FREEZE
HEY. YOU WERE WALKING WITH MAO JUST NOW, WEREN'T YOU?
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?
HUH?

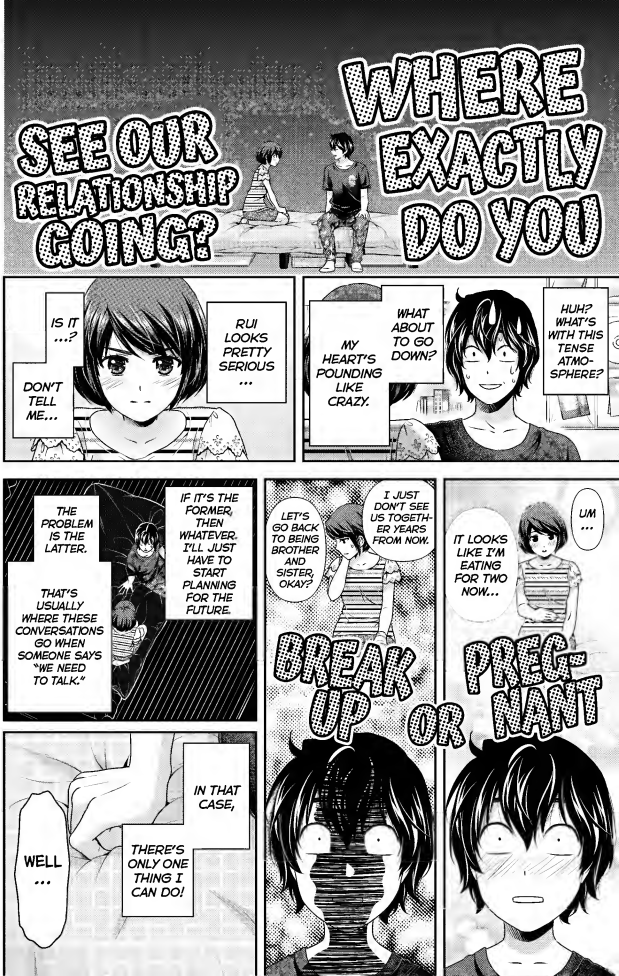

NAT-KUN'S FROM FORESTER.
HE SAID HE WAS BROKE, SO I HOOKED HIM UP WITH A JOB.
NAT-KUN?!
HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO TELL YOU, MAO? QUIT GIVING EVERYONE NICKNAMES!
GUYS ARE GONNA GET THE WRONG IDEA AND FALL FOR YOU!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
EVERYTHING!
I SWEAR, I CAN'T TAKE MY EYES OFF OF YOU FOR A SECOND!
TRY PUTTING YOURSELF IN MY SHOES FOR ONCE! I WAS WORRIED SICK!
SWOOP
AS PUNISHMENT, I'M GONNA CARRY YOU ALL THE WAY HOME!
LATER, NAT-KUN!
I'M GUESSING THE REASON MAO-SEMPAI DOESN'T HAVE A BOYFRIEND DESPITE BEING SUCH A FLIRT...
...IS HER YOUNGER BROTHER.
THERE ARE ALL KINDS OF SIBLINGS OUT THERE...

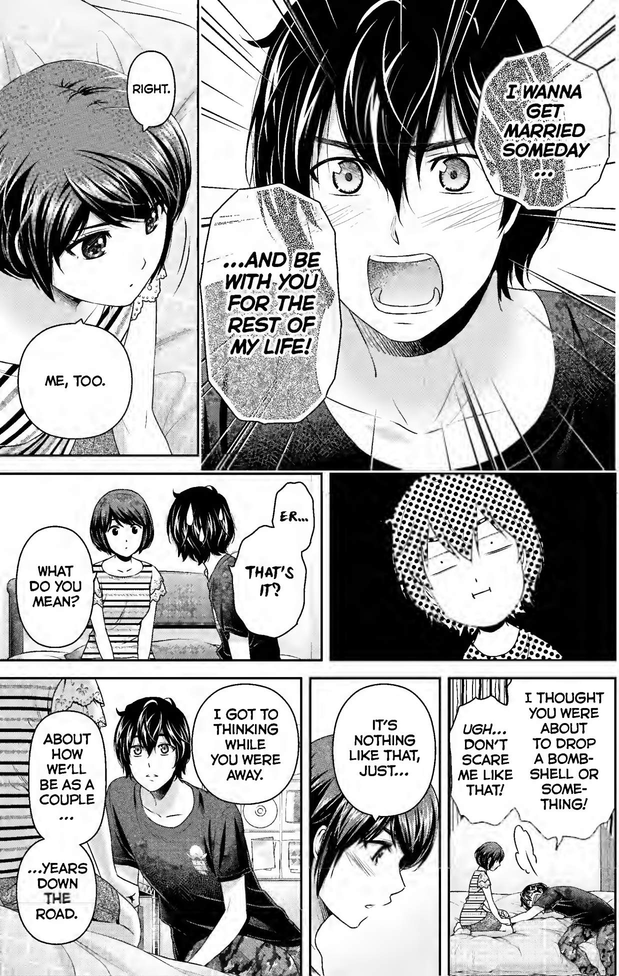

I'M HOME!
WELCOME BACK.
HOW WAS THE JOB?
NUTS. I WAS FLOORED WHEN I HEARD WE WERE STAYING TWO NIGHTS.
I DIDN'T EVEN BRING A CHANGE OF CLOTHES WITH ME.
GINGKO MANOR'S A HUGE, FAMOUS INN IN ATAMI, RIGHT?
APPARENTLY.
THERE WERE SO MANY ROOMS AND SO MUCH TO DO. I WAS DEAD BY THE END.
I BET IT GAVE YOU A NEW APPRECIATION FOR MONEY, HUH?
NO JOKE. I'LL NEVER TAKE MONEY FOR GRANTED AGAIN.
CHACK
カチャ

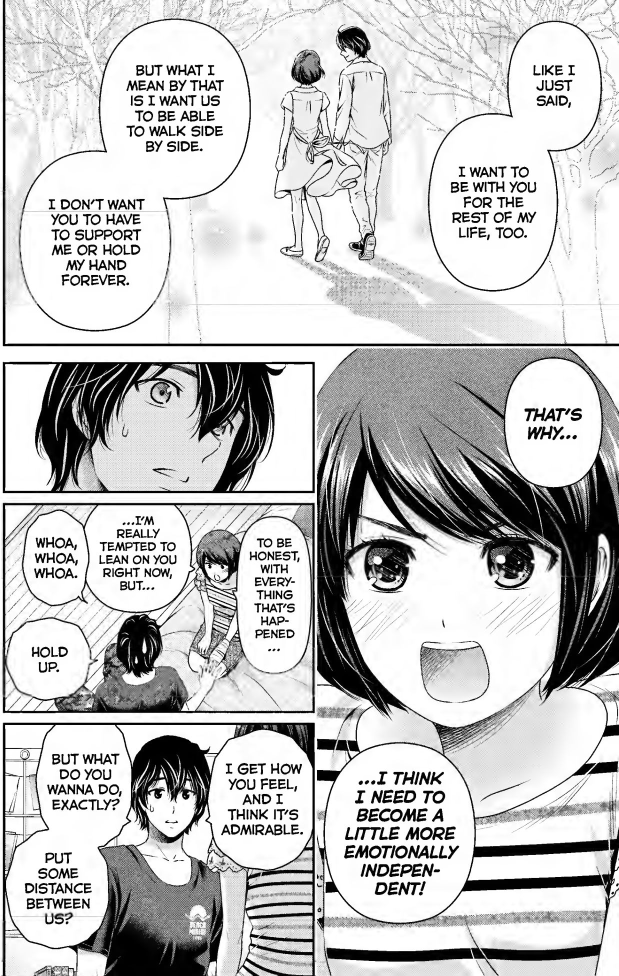

RUI!
SHUF スタ
SHUF スタ
I'M HOME. HOW'S YOUR HAND?
I PICKED UP SOME TREATS IN ATAMI. LET'S EAT 'EM LATER...
COME SIT DOWN FOR A SEC.
HUH?
UH, OKAY...
WE HAVE TO TALK.
IT'S ABOUT THE FUTURE.

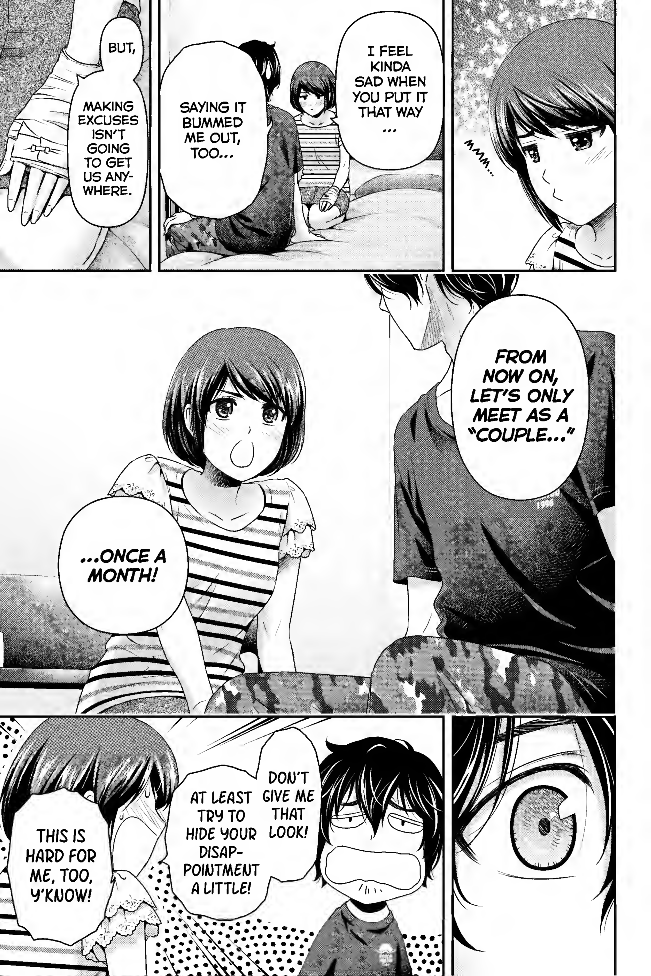
# CHAPTER 162: LOOKING BEYOND

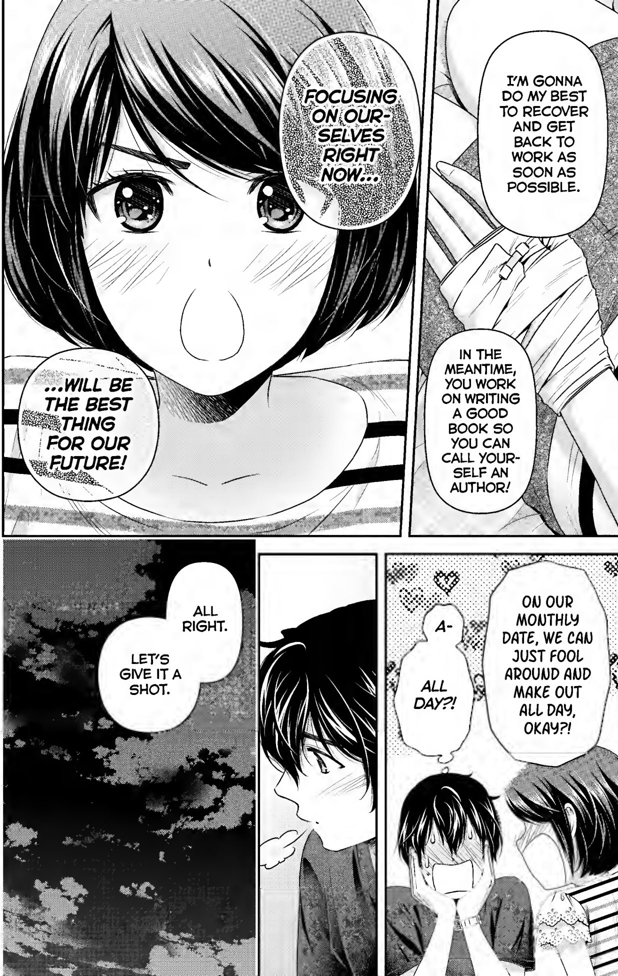

TH- THE FUTURE?
LIKE WHAT?
WHERE EXACTLY...
...DO YOU SEE OUR RELATIONSHIP GOING, NATSUO?

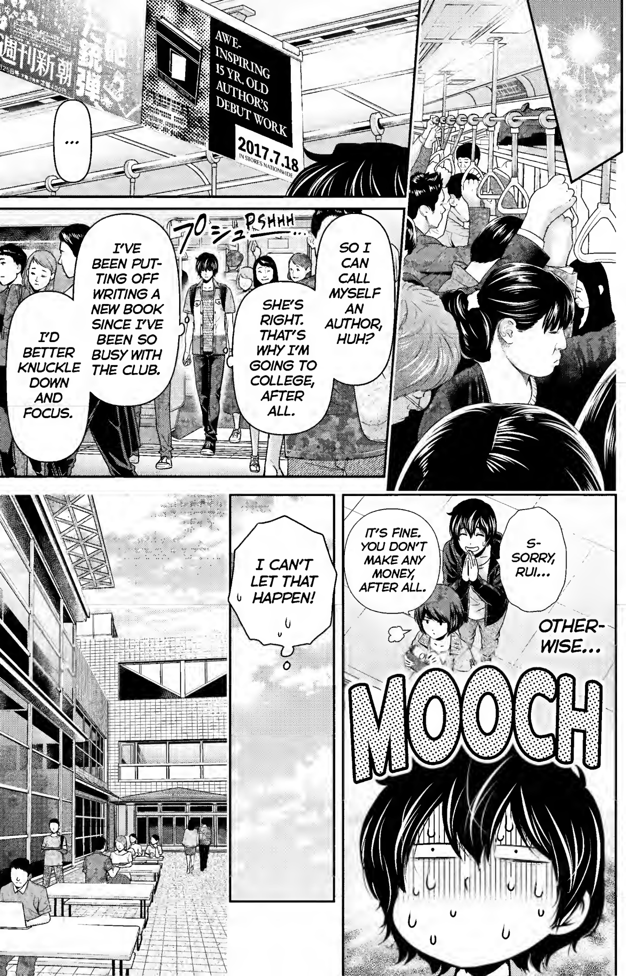

WHERE EXACTLY DO YOU
SEE OUR RELATIONSHIP GOING?
HUH? WHAT'S WITH THIS TENSE ATMOSPHERE?
WHAT ABOUT TO GO DOWN?
MY HEART'S POUNDING LIKE CRAZY.
RUI LOOKS PRETTY SERIOUS ...
IS IT ...?
DON'T TELL ME...
UM ...
IT LOOKS LIKE I'M EATING FOR TWO NOW...
PREG-NANT
OR
I JUST DON'T SEE US TOGETHER YEARS FROM NOW.
LET'S GO BACK TO BEING BROTHER AND SISTER, OKAY?
BREAK UP
IF IT'S THE FORMER, THEN WHATEVER. I'LL JUST HAVE TO START PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.
THE PROBLEM IS THE LATTER.
THAT'S USUALLY WHERE THESE CONVERSATIONS GO WHEN SOMEONE SAYS "WE NEED TO TALK."
IN THAT CASE,
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING I CAN DO!
WELL ...

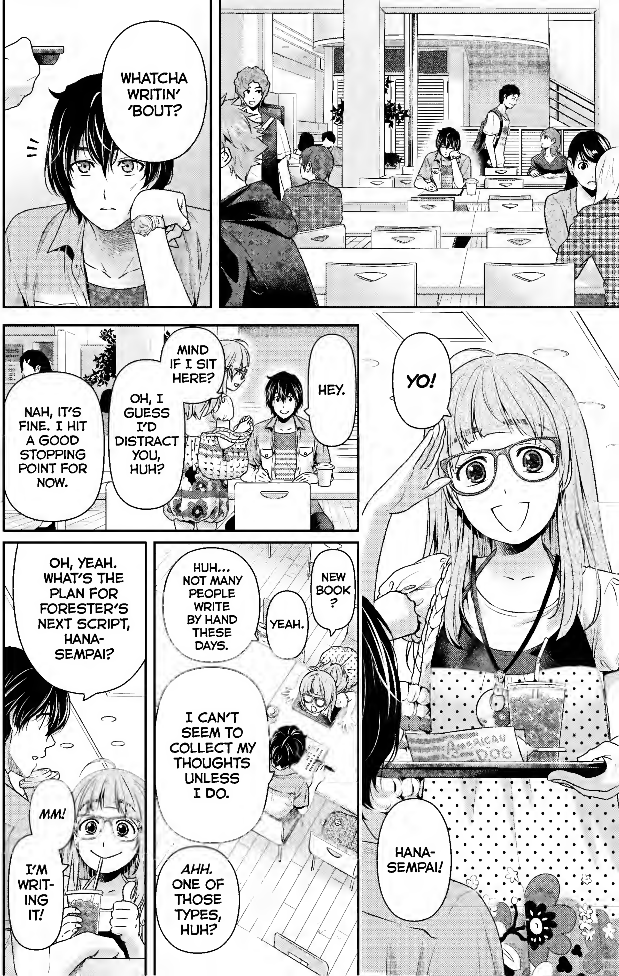

I WANNA GET MARRIED SOMEDAY...
...AND BE WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!
RIGHT.
ME, TOO.
ER...
THAT'S IT?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE ABOUT TO DROP A BOMBSHELL OR SOMETHING!
UGH... DON'T SCARE ME LIKE THAT!
IT'S NOTHING LIKE THAT, JUST...
I GOT TO THINKING WHILE YOU WERE AWAY.
ABOUT HOW WE'LL BE AS A COUPLE...
...YEARS DOWN THE ROAD.

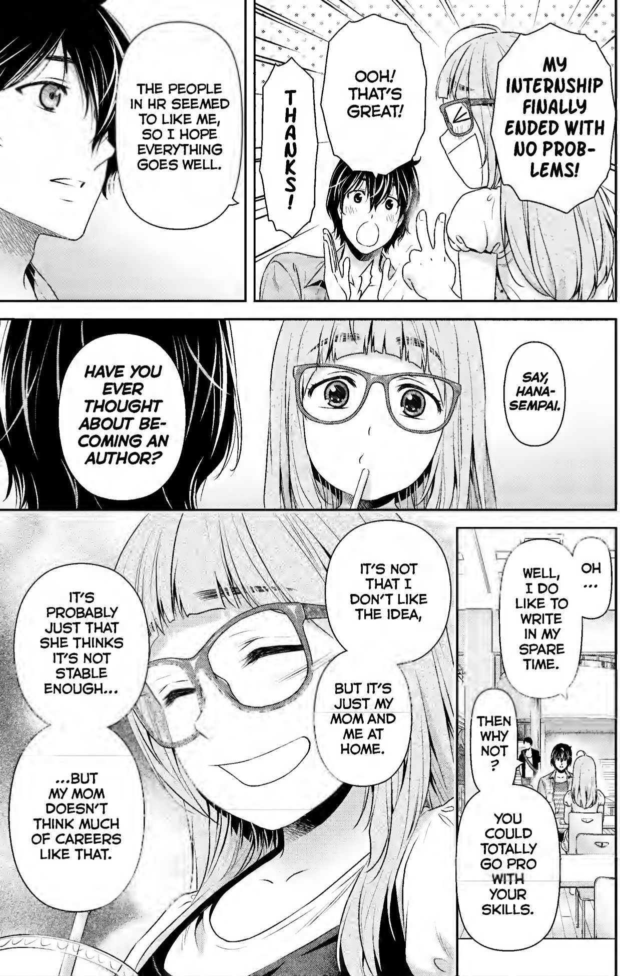

LIKE I JUST SAID,
I WANT TO BE WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE, TOO.
BUT WHAT I MEAN BY THAT IS I WANT US TO BE ABLE TO WALK SIDE BY SIDE.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO HAVE TO SUPPORT ME OR HOLD MY HAND FOREVER.
THAT'S WHY...
...I THINK I NEED TO BECOME A LITTLE MORE EMOTIONALLY INDEPENDENT!
TO BE HONEST, WITH EVERYTHING THAT'S HAPPENED...
...I'M REALLY TEMPTED TO LEAN ON YOU RIGHT NOW, BUT...
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA.
HOLD UP.
I GET HOW YOU FEEL, AND I THINK IT'S ADMIRABLE.
BUT WHAT DO YOU WANNA DO, EXACTLY?
PUT SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN US?

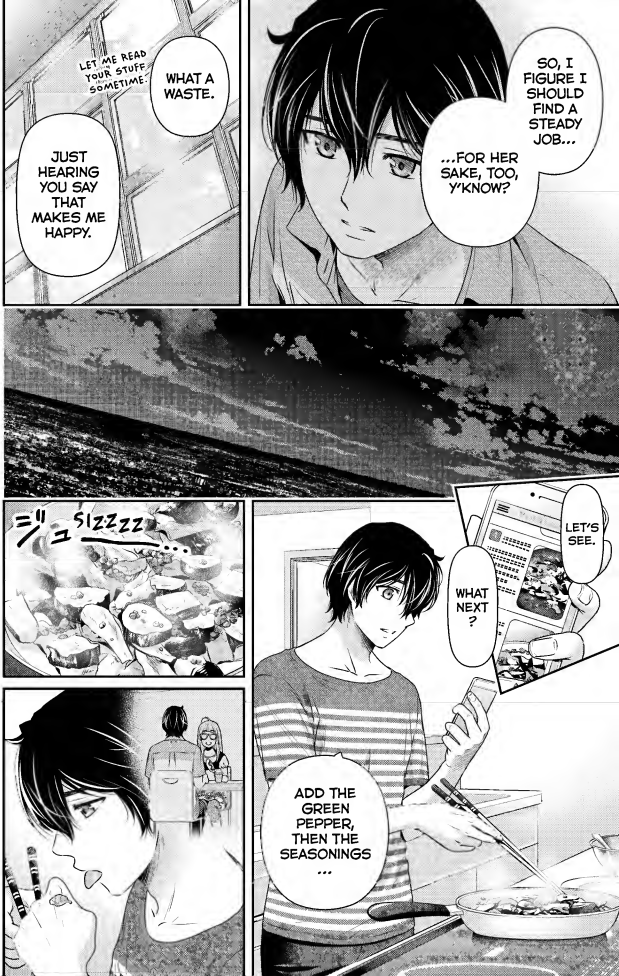

MMM...
I FEEL KINDA SAD WHEN YOU PUT IT THAT WAY ...
SAYING IT BUMMED ME OUT, TOO...
BUT,
MAKING EXCUSES ISN'T GOING TO GET US ANYWHERE.
FROM NOW ON, LET'S ONLY MEET AS A "COUPLE..."
...ONCE A MONTH!
DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK!
AT LEAST TRY TO HIDE YOUR DISAPPOINTMENT A LITTLE!
THIS IS HARD FOR ME, TOO, Y'KNOW!

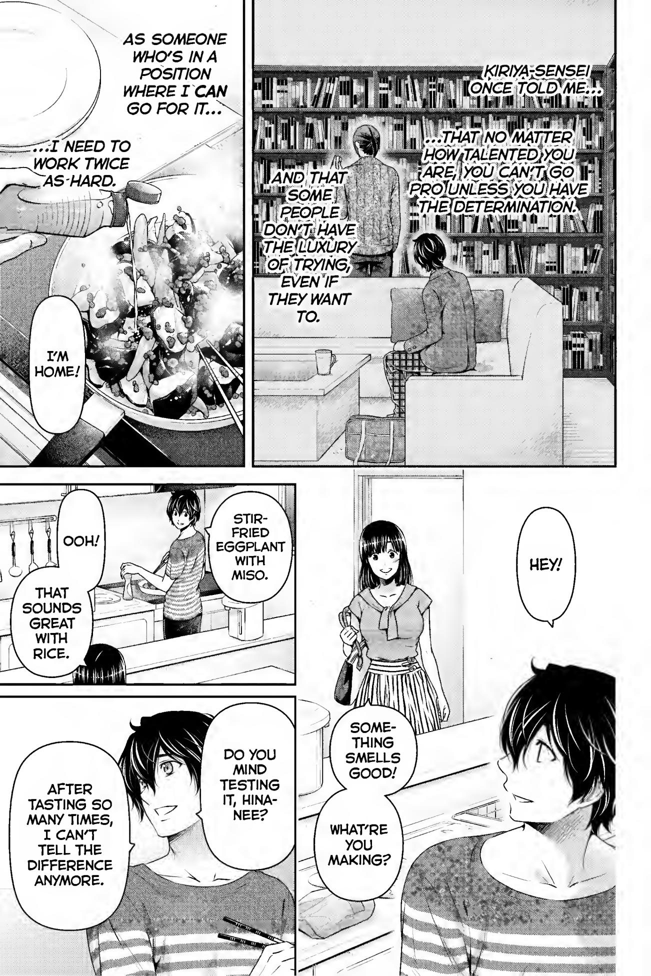

I'M GONNA DO MY BEST TO RECOVER AND GET BACK TO WORK AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
IN THE MEANTIME, YOU WORK ON WRITING A GOOD BOOK SO YOU CAN CALL YOURSELF AN AUTHOR!
FOCUSING ON OURSELVES RIGHT NOW...
...WILL BE THE BEST THING FOR OUR FUTURE!
ON OUR MONTHLY DATE, WE CAN JUST FOOL AROUND AND MAKE OUT ALL DAY, OKAY?!
A- ALL DAY?!
ALL RIGHT.
LET'S GIVE IT A SHOT.

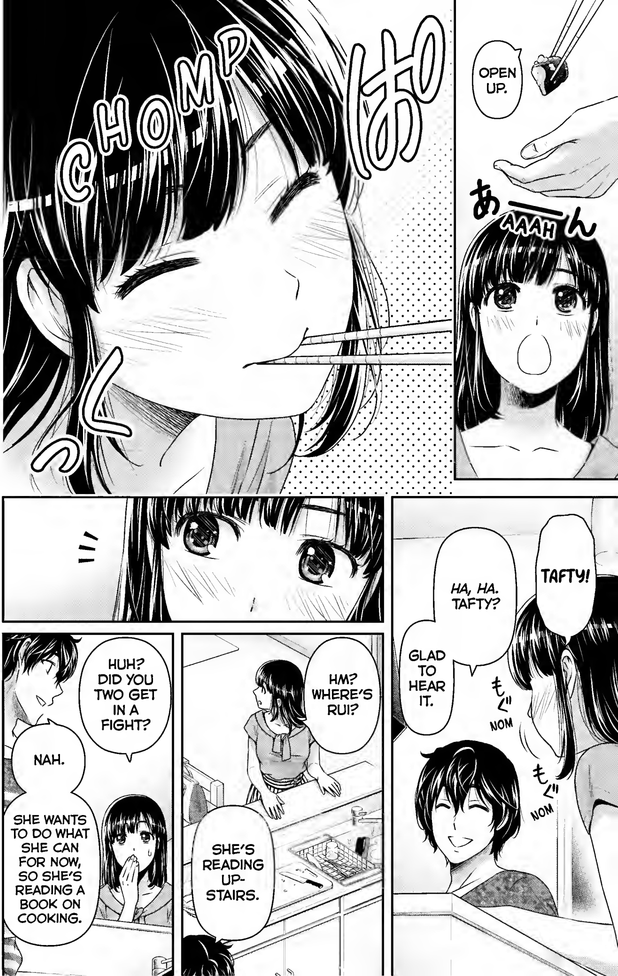

週刊新朝
AWE-INSPIRING 15 YR. OLD AUTHOR'S DEBUT WORK
2017.7.18
IN STORES NATIONWIDE
...
フシュ PSHHH...
SO I CAN CALL MYSELF AN AUTHOR, HUH?
SHE'S RIGHT. THAT'S WHY I'M GOING TO COLLEGE, AFTER ALL.
I'VE BEEN PUTTING OFF WRITING A NEW BOOK SINCE I'VE BEEN SO BUSY WITH THE CLUB.
I'D BETTER KNUCKLE DOWN AND FOCUS.
S-SORRY, RUI...
IT'S FINE. YOU DON'T MAKE ANY MONEY, AFTER ALL.
OTHERWISE...
MOOCH
I CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN!

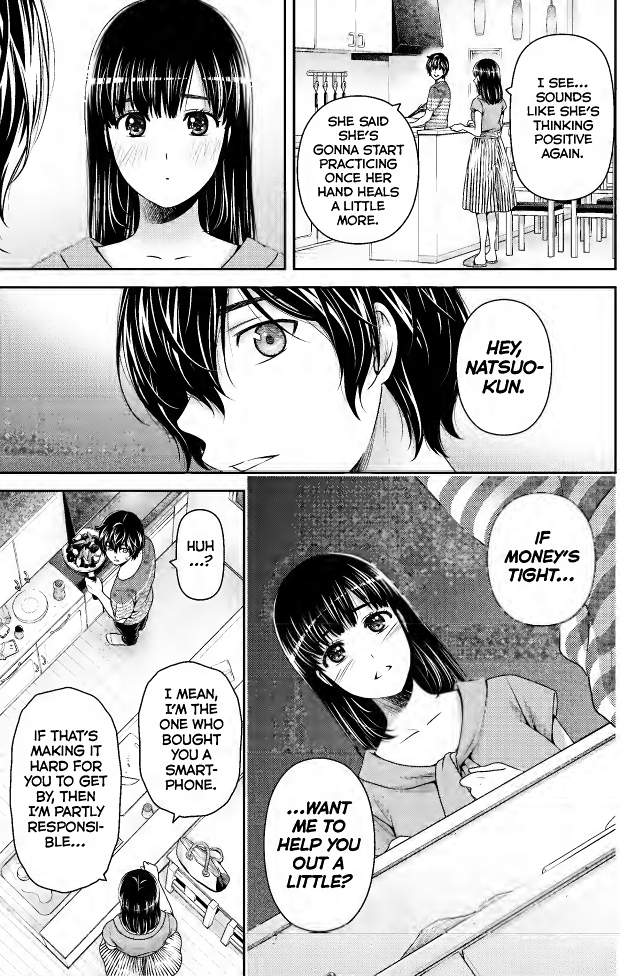

WHATCHA WRITIN' 'BOUT?
YO!
HANA-SEMPAI!
AMERICAN DOG
HEY.
MIND IF I SIT HERE?
OH, I GUESS I'D DISTRACT YOU, HUH?
NAH, IT'S FINE. I HIT A GOOD STOPPING POINT FOR NOW.
NEW BOOK?
YEAH.
HUH... NOT MANY PEOPLE WRITE BY HAND THESE DAYS.
I CAN'T SEEM TO COLLECT MY THOUGHTS UNLESS I DO.
AHH. ONE OF THOSE TYPES, HUH?
OH, YEAH. WHAT'S THE PLAN FOR FORESTER'S NEXT SCRIPT, HANA-SEMPAI?
MM!
I'M WRIT-ING IT!

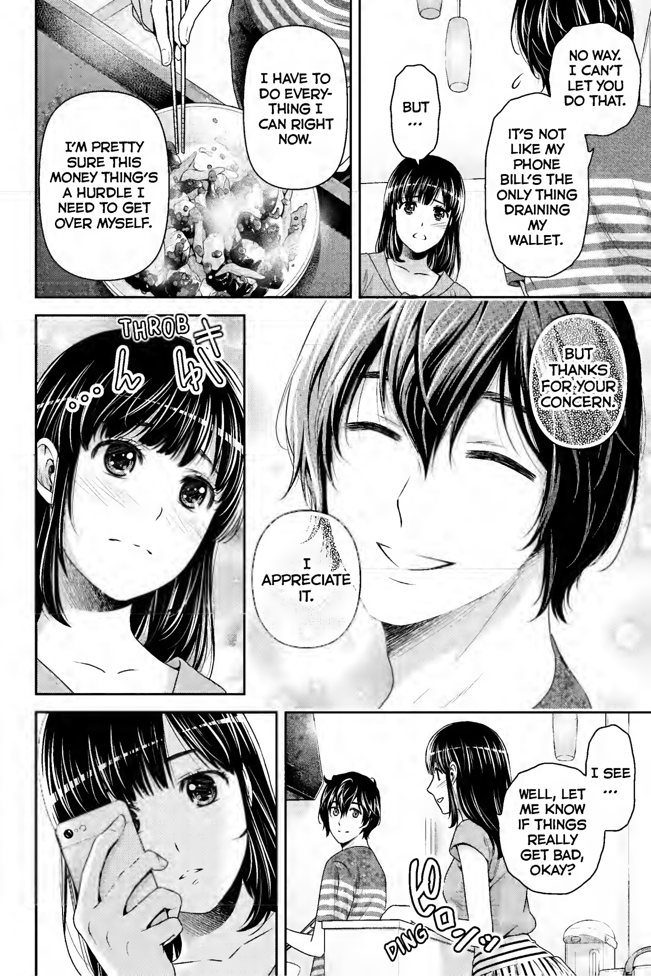

MY INTERNSHIP FINALLY ENDED WITH NO PROBLEMS!
OOH! THAT'S GREAT!
THANKS!
THE PEOPLE IN HR SEEMED TO LIKE ME, SO I HOPE EVERYTHING GOES WELL.
SAY, HANA-SEMPAI.
*HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT BECOMING AN AUTHOR?*
OH ...
WELL, I DO LIKE TO WRITE IN MY SPARE TIME.
THEN WHY NOT?
YOU COULD TOTALLY GO PRO WITH YOUR SKILLS.
IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA,
BUT IT'S JUST MY MOM AND ME AT HOME.
...BUT MY MOM DOESN'T THINK MUCH OF CAREERS LIKE THAT.
IT'S PROBABLY JUST THAT SHE THINKS IT'S NOT STABLE ENOUGH...

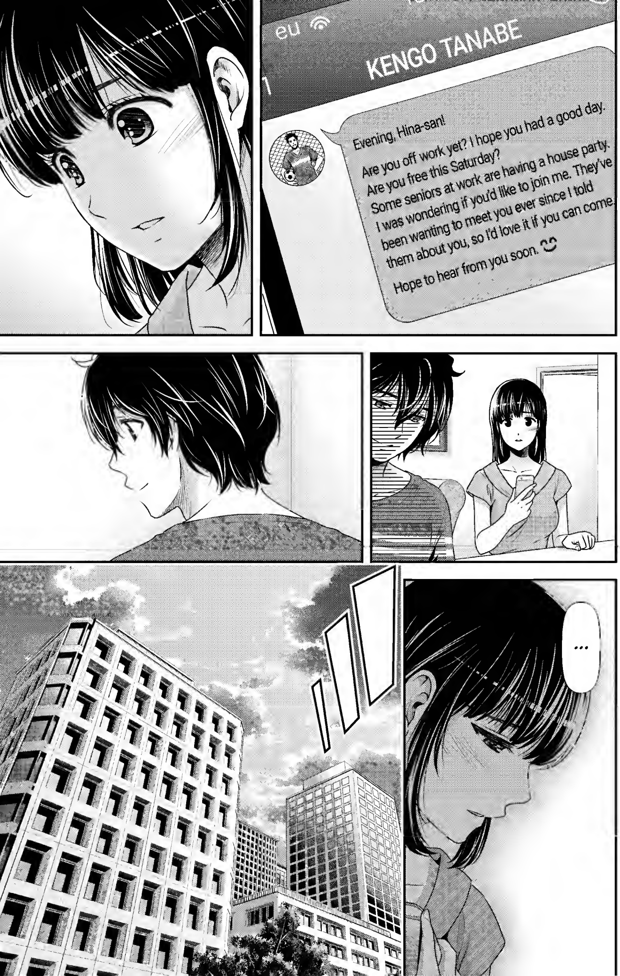

SO, I FIGURE I SHOULD FIND A STEADY JOB...
...FOR HER SAKE, TOO, Y'KNOW?
WHAT A WASTE.
LET ME READ YOUR STUFF SOMETIME.
JUST HEARING YOU SAY THAT MAKES ME HAPPY.
LET'S SEE.
WHAT NEXT?
ADD THE GREEN PEPPER, THEN THE SEASONINGS...
ジュ SIZZZZZ...


KIRIYA-SENSEI ONCE TOLD ME...
...THAT NO MATTER HOW TALENTED YOU ARE, YOU CAN'T GO PRO UNLESS YOU HAVE THE DETERMINATION.
AND THAT SOME PEOPLE DON'T HAVE THE LUXURY OF TRYING, EVEN IF THEY WANT TO.
AS SOMEONE WHO'S IN A POSITION WHERE I CAN GO FOR IT...
...I NEED TO WORK TWICE AS HARD.
I'M HOME!
HEY!
SOMETHING SMELLS GOOD!
WHAT'RE YOU MAKING?
STIR-FRIED EGGPLANT WITH MISO.
OOH!
THAT SOUNDS GREAT WITH RICE.
DO YOU MIND TESTING IT, HINA-NEE?
AFTER TASTING SO MANY TIMES, I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE ANYMORE.

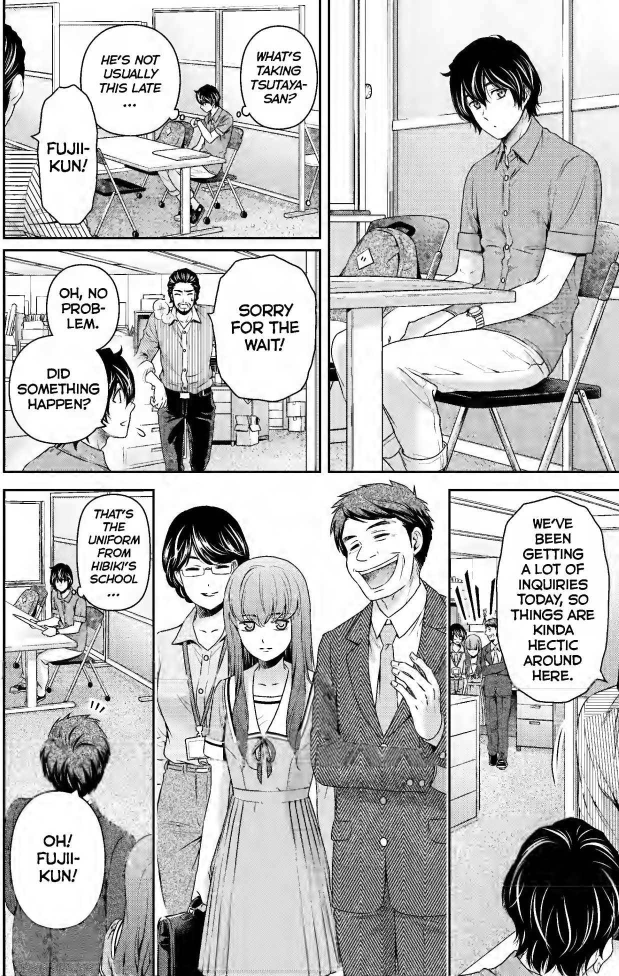

OPEN UP.
あ—ん
AAAH
CHOMP
ぱくっ
TAFTY!
HA, HA. TAFTY?
GLAD TO HEAR IT.
もぐ
NOM
もぐ
NOM
HM? WHERE'S RUI?
SHE'S READING UP-STAIRS.
HUH? DID YOU TWO GET IN A FIGHT?
NAH.
SHE WANTS TO DO WHAT SHE CAN FOR NOW, SO SHE'S READING A BOOK ON COOKING.

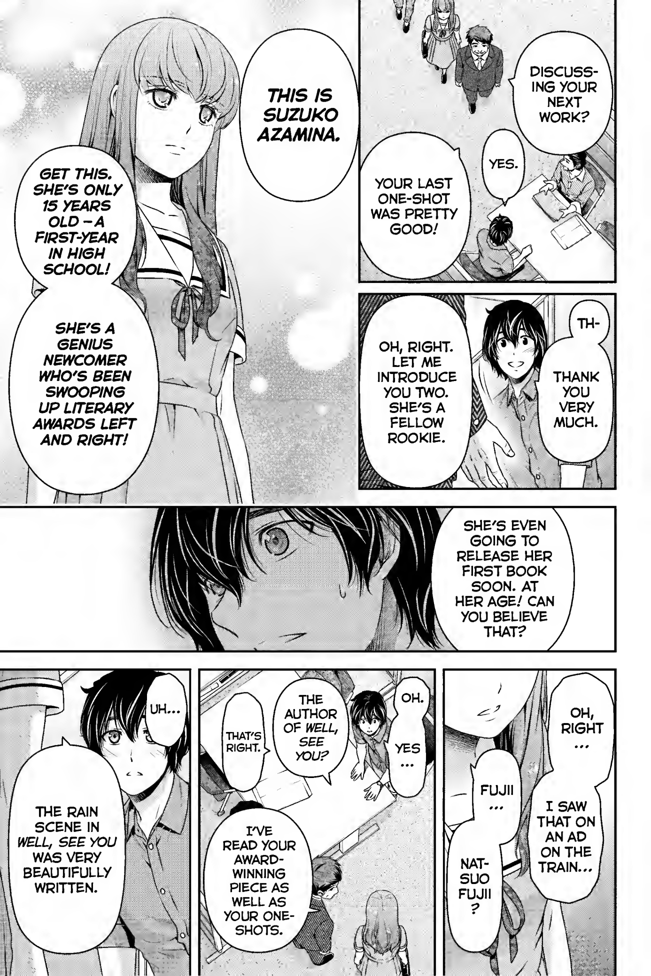

SHE SAID SHE'S GONNA START PRACTICING ONCE HER HAND HEALS A LITTLE MORE.
I SEE... SOUNDS LIKE SHE'S THINKING POSITIVE AGAIN.
HEY, NATSUO-KUN.
IF MONEY'S TIGHT...
...WANT ME TO HELP YOU OUT A LITTLE?
HUH ...?
I MEAN, I'M THE ONE WHO BOUGHT YOU A SMARTPHONE.
IF THAT'S MAKING IT HARD FOR YOU TO GET BY, THEN I'M PARTLY RESPONSIBLE...

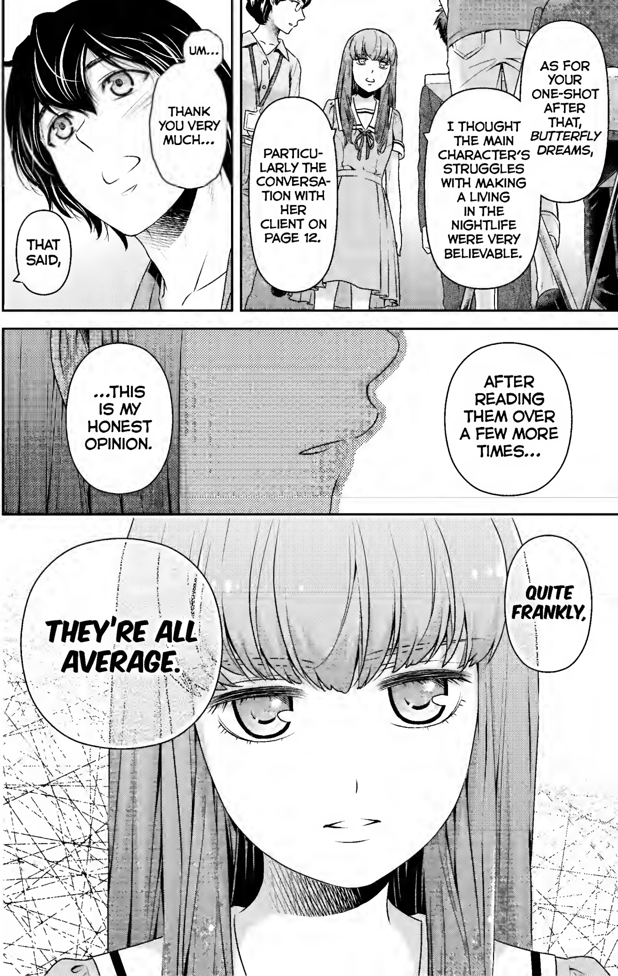

NO WAY. I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT.
IT'S NOT LIKE MY PHONE BILL'S THE ONLY THING DRAINING MY WALLET.
BUT ...
I HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING I CAN RIGHT NOW.
I'M PRETTY SURE THIS MONEY THING'S A HURDLE I NEED TO GET OVER MYSELF.
BUT THANKS FOR YOUR CONCERN.
I APPRECIATE IT.
きゅ…ん
THROB
I SEE ...
WELL, LET ME KNOW IF THINGS REALLY GET BAD, OKAY?
ピロン
DING



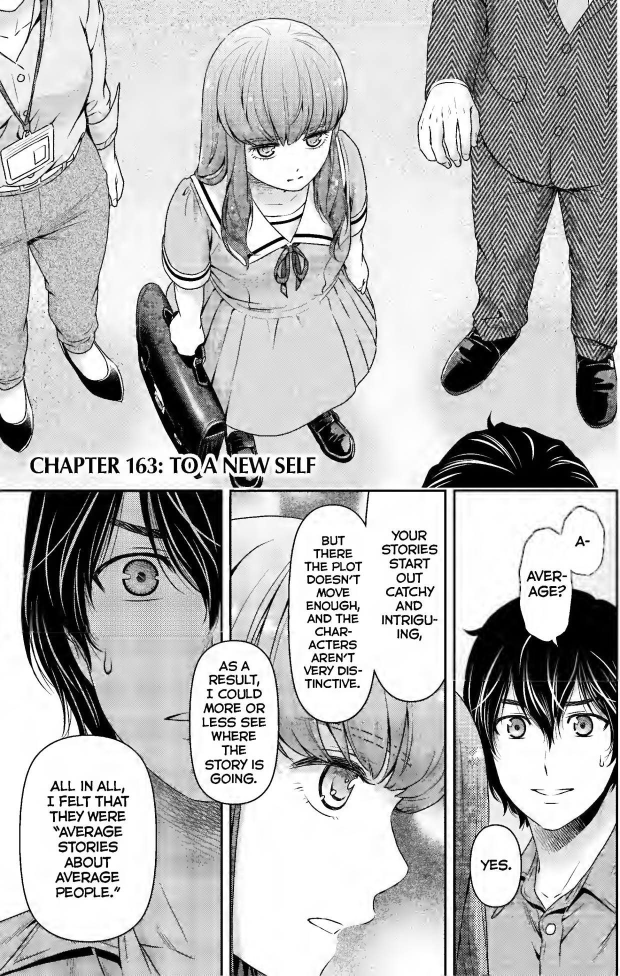
Evening, Hina-san!
Are you off work yet? I hope you had a good day.
Are you free this Saturday?
Some seniors at work are having a house party.
I was wondering if you'd like to join me. They've been wanting to meet you ever since I told them about you, so I'd love it if you can come. ◡̈
Hope to hear from you soon.

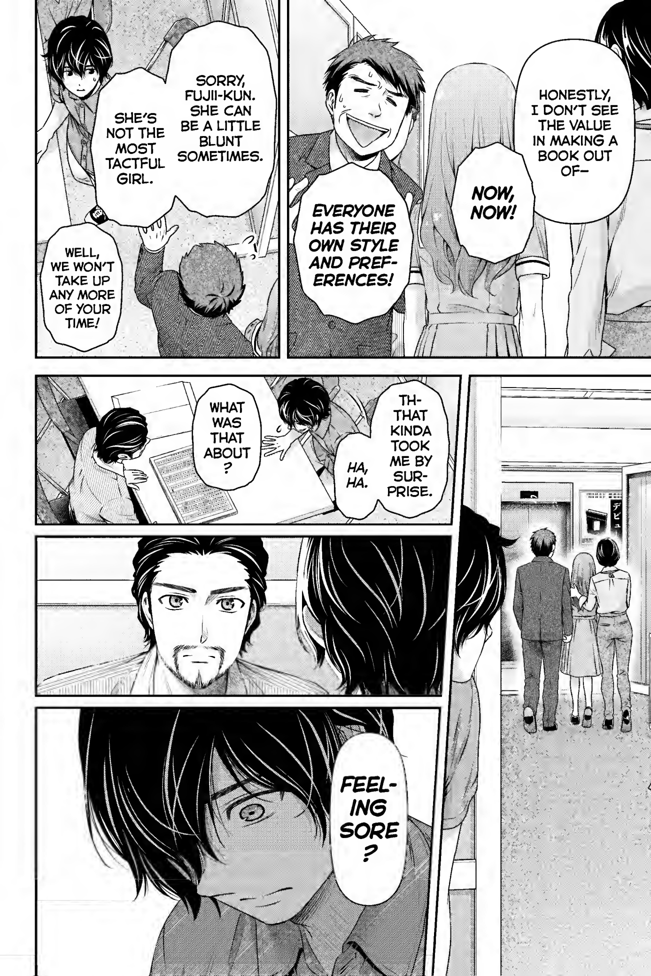

WHAT'S TAKING TSUTAYA-SAN?
HE'S NOT USUALLY THIS LATE...
FUJII-KUN!
SORRY FOR THE WAIT!
OH, NO PROBLEM.
DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?
WE'VE BEEN GETTING A LOT OF INQUIRIES TODAY, SO THINGS ARE KINDA HECTIC AROUND HERE.
THAT'S THE UNIFORM FROM HIBIKI'S SCHOOL...
OH! FUJII-KUN!

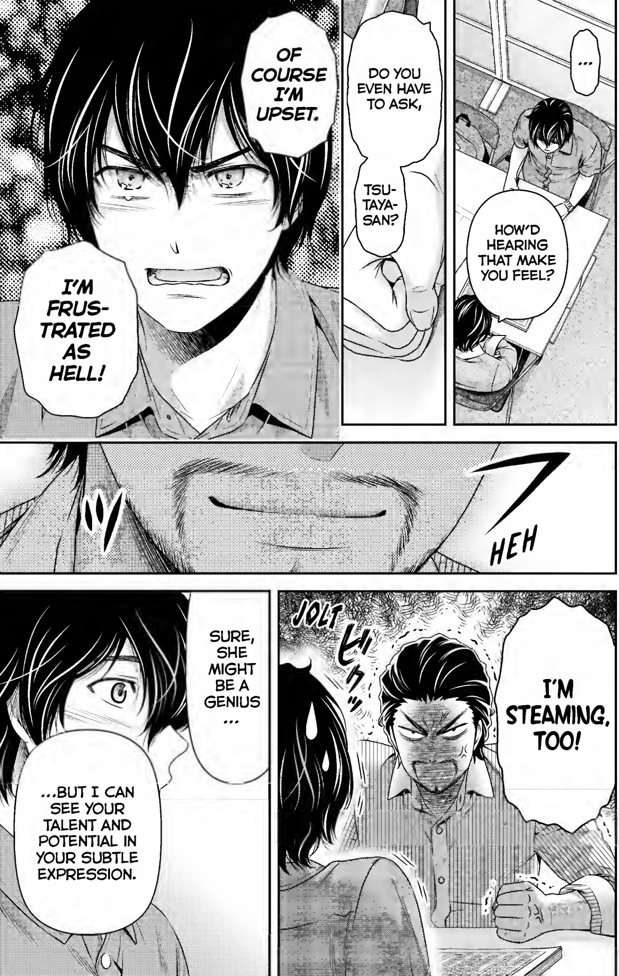

DISCUSSING YOUR NEXT WORK?
YES.
YOUR LAST ONE-SHOT WAS PRETTY GOOD!
TH-
THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
OH, RIGHT. LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TWO. SHE'S A FELLOW ROOKIE.
*THIS IS SUZUKO AZAMINA.*
*GET THIS. SHE'S ONLY 15 YEARS OLD – A FIRST-YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL!*
*SHE'S A GENIUS NEWCOMER WHO'S BEEN SWOOPING UP LITERARY AWARDS LEFT AND RIGHT!*
SHE'S EVEN GOING TO RELEASE HER FIRST BOOK SOON. AT HER AGE! CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT?
OH, RIGHT...
I SAW THAT ON AN AD ON THE TRAIN...
FUJII...
NATSUO FUJII?
OH.
YES...
THE AUTHOR OF *WELL, SEE YOU*?
THAT'S RIGHT.
I'VE READ YOUR AWARD-WINNING PIECE AS WELL AS YOUR ONE-SHOTS.
UH...
THE RAIN SCENE IN *WELL, SEE YOU* WAS VERY BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN.

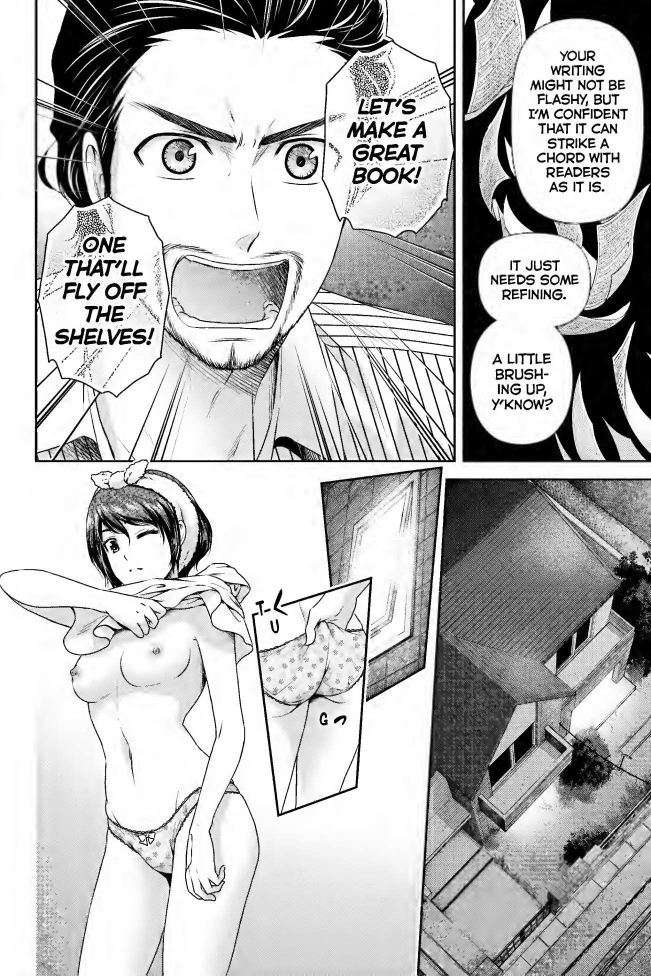

AS FOR YOUR ONE-SHOT AFTER THAT, *BUTTERFLY DREAMS*,
I THOUGHT THE MAIN CHARACTER'S STRUGGLES WITH MAKING A LIVING IN THE NIGHTLIFE WERE VERY BELIEVABLE.
PARTICULARLY THE CONVERSATION WITH HER CLIENT ON PAGE 12.
UM...
THANK YOU VERY MUCH...
THAT SAID,
AFTER READING THEM OVER A FEW MORE TIMES...
...THIS IS MY HONEST OPINION.
*QUITE FRANKLY,*
*THEY'RE ALL AVERAGE.*

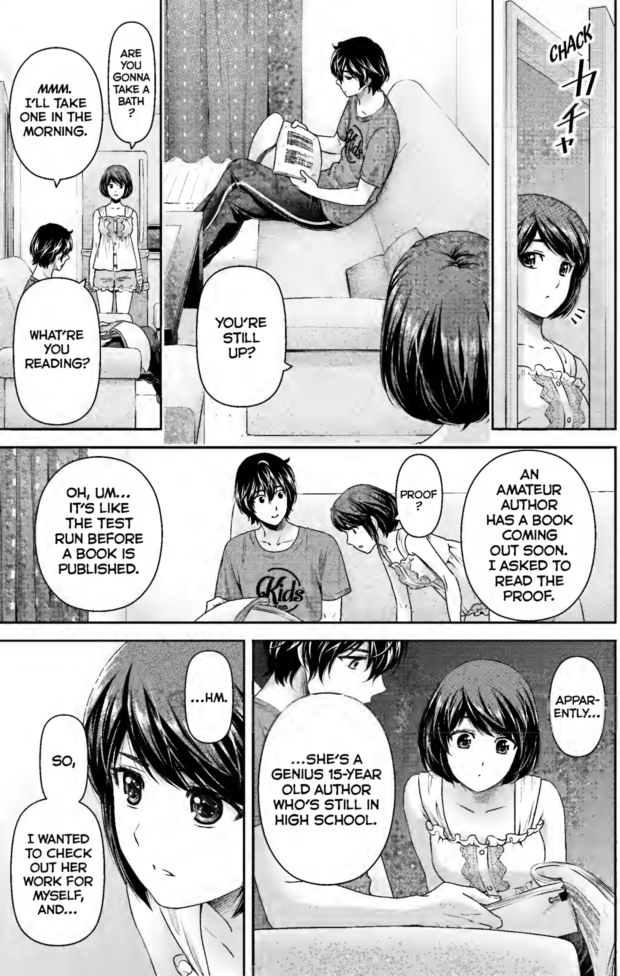
# CHAPTER 163: TO A NEW SELF

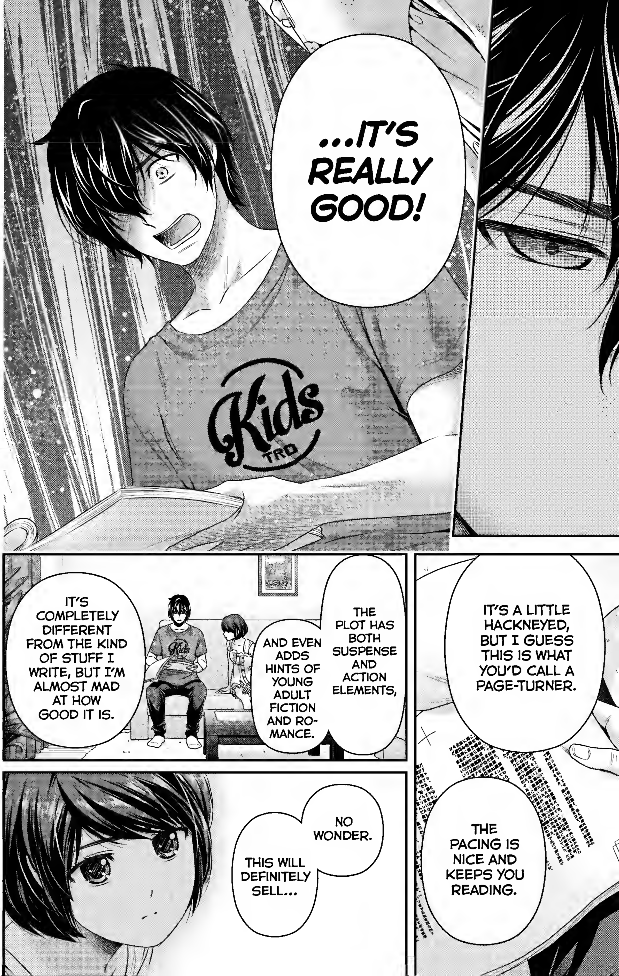

A- AVERAGE?
YES.
YOUR STORIES START OUT CATCHY AND INTRIGUING,
BUT THERE THE PLOT DOESN'T MOVE ENOUGH, AND THE CHARACTERS AREN'T VERY DISTINCTIVE.
AS A RESULT, I COULD MORE OR LESS SEE WHERE THE STORY IS GOING.
ALL IN ALL, I FELT THAT THEY WERE "AVERAGE STORIES ABOUT AVERAGE PEOPLE."

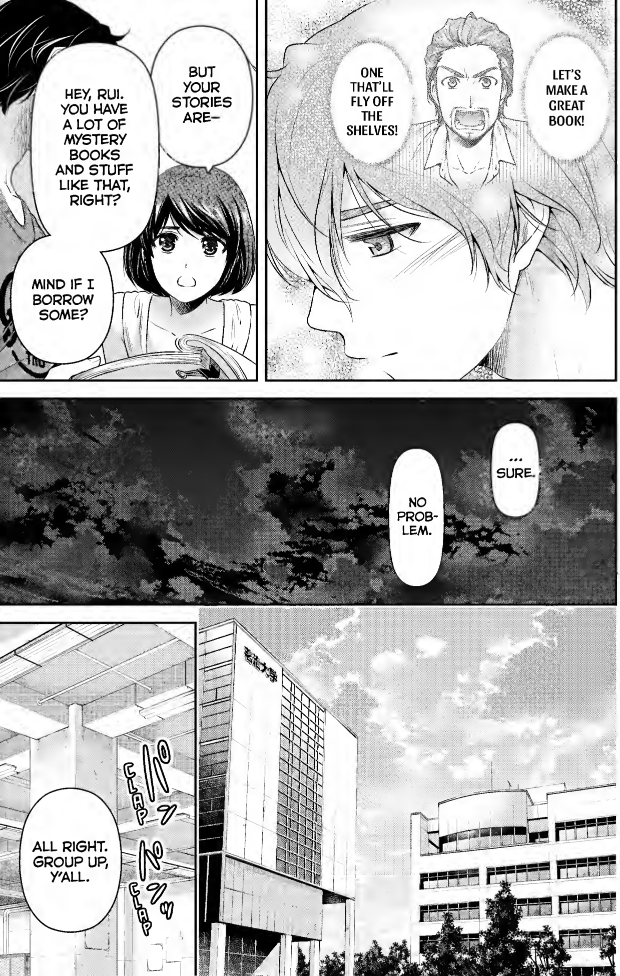

HONESTLY, I DON'T SEE THE VALUE IN MAKING A BOOK OUT OF–
NOW, NOW!
EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN STYLE AND PREFERENCES!
SORRY, FUJII-KUN. SHE CAN BE A LITTLE BLUNT SOMETIMES.
SHE'S NOT THE MOST TACTFUL GIRL.
WELL, WE WON'T TAKE UP ANY MORE OF YOUR TIME!
デビュ
TH-THAT KINDA TOOK ME BY SURPRISE.
HA, HA.
WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT?
FEELING SORE?

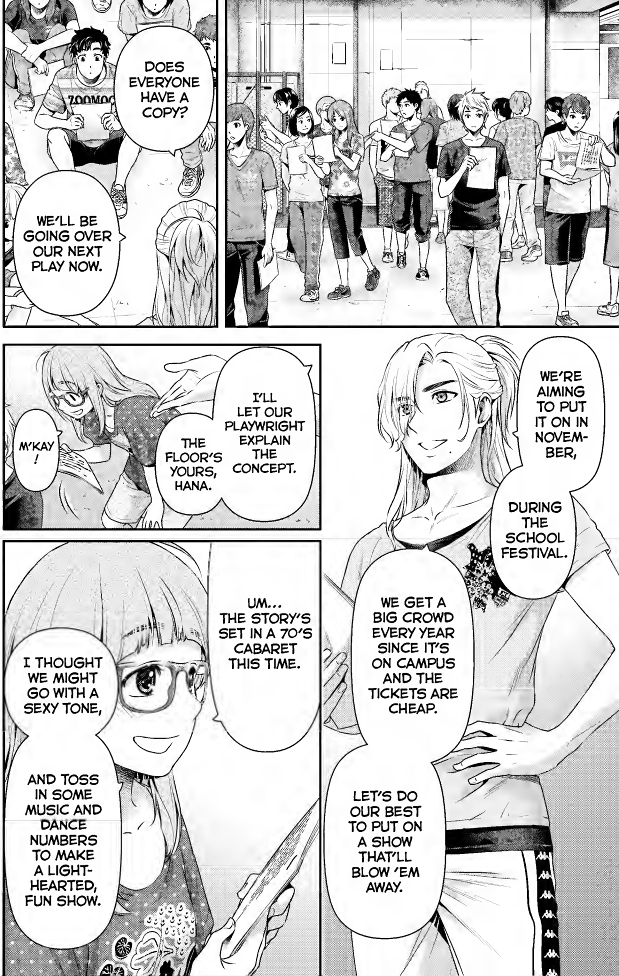

...
HOW'D HEARING THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?
DO YOU EVEN HAVE TO ASK, TSUTAYA-SAN?
OF COURSE I'M UPSET.
I'M FRUSTRATED AS HELL!
HEH
JOLT
I'M STEAMING, TOO!
SURE, SHE MIGHT BE A GENIUS...
...BUT I CAN SEE YOUR TALENT AND POTENTIAL IN YOUR SUBTLE EXPRESSION.

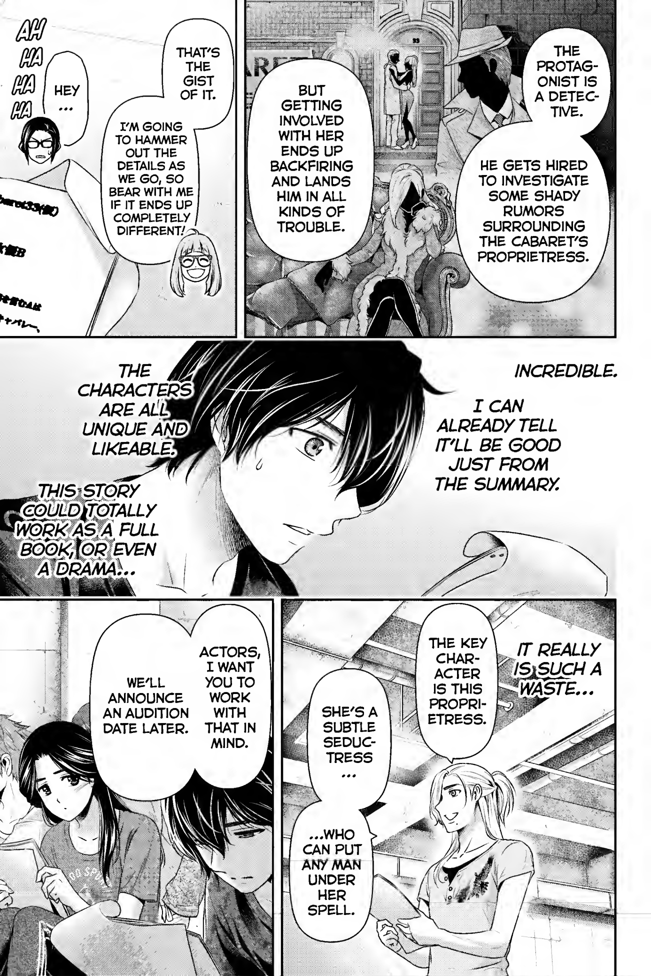

YOUR WRITING MIGHT NOT BE FLASHY, BUT I'M CONFIDENT THAT IT CAN STRIKE A CHORD WITH READERS AS IT IS.
IT JUST NEEDS SOME REFINING.
A LITTLE BRUSHING UP, Y'KNOW?
LET'S MAKE A GREAT BOOK!
ONE THAT'LL FLY OFF THE SHELVES!
T-U
G

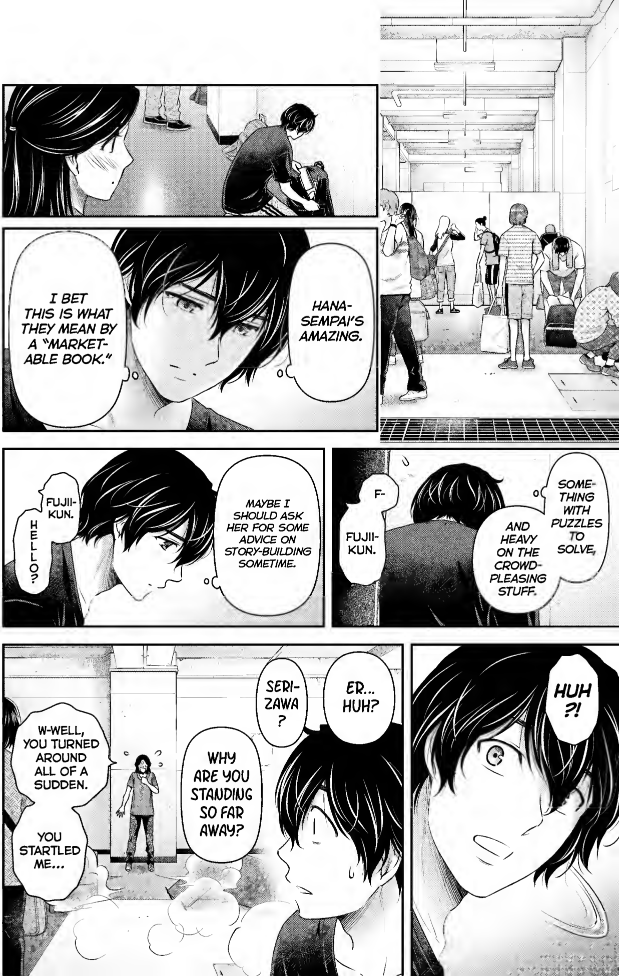

CHACK
カチャ
YOU'RE STILL UP?
ARE YOU GONNA TAKE A BATH?
MMM. I'LL TAKE ONE IN THE MORNING.
WHAT'RE YOU READING?
AN AMATEUR AUTHOR HAS A BOOK COMING OUT SOON. I ASKED TO READ THE PROOF.
PROOF?
OH, UM... IT'S LIKE THE TEST RUN BEFORE A BOOK IS PUBLISHED.
APPARENTLY...
...SHE'S A GENIUS 15-YEAR OLD AUTHOR WHO'S STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL.
...HM.
SO,
I WANTED TO CHECK OUT HER WORK FOR MYSELF, AND...

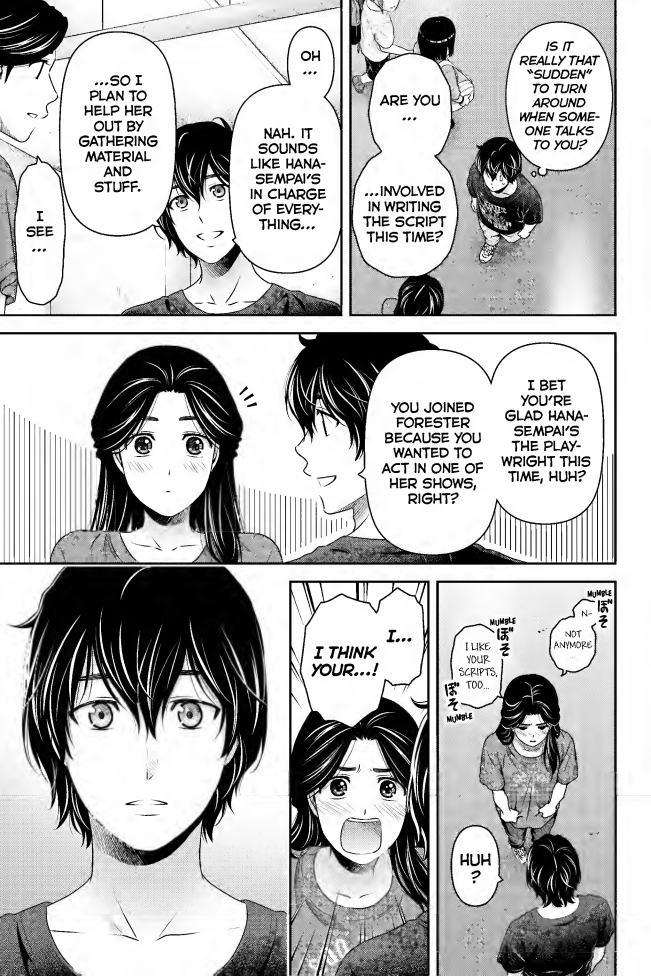

...IT'S REALLY GOOD!
Kids TRD
IT'S A LITTLE HACKNEYED, BUT I GUESS THIS IS WHAT YOU'D CALL A PAGE-TURNER.
THE PACING IS NICE AND KEEPS YOU READING.
THE PLOT HAS BOTH SUSPENSE AND ACTION ELEMENTS,
AND EVEN ADDS HINTS OF YOUNG ADULT FICTION AND ROMANCE.
IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE KIND OF STUFF I WRITE, BUT I'M ALMOST MAD AT HOW GOOD IT IS.
NO WONDER.
THIS WILL DEFINITELY SELL...

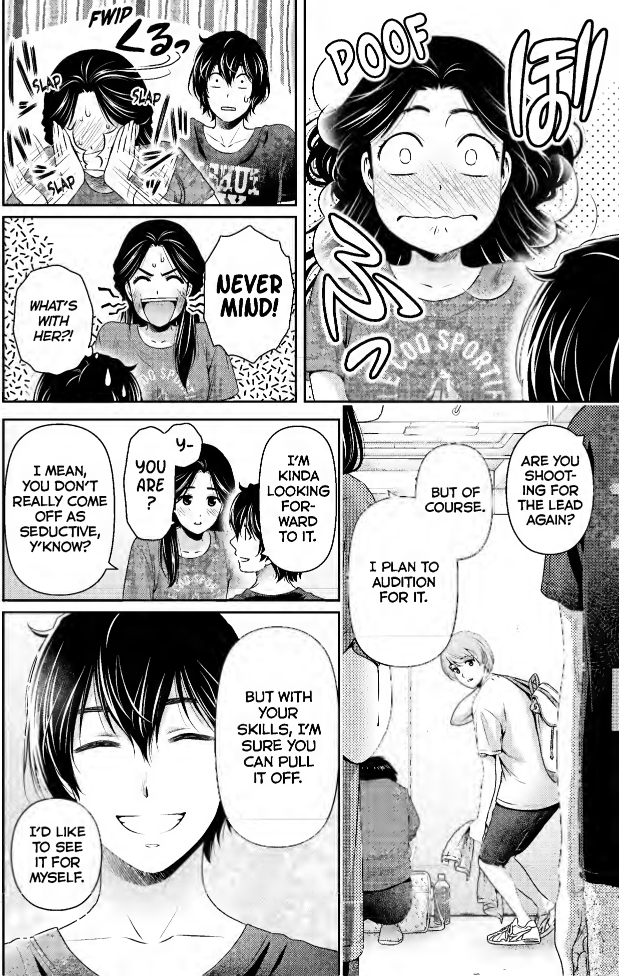

LET'S MAKE A GREAT BOOK!
ONE THAT'LL FLY OFF THE SHELVES!
BUT YOUR STORIES ARE—
HEY, RUI. YOU HAVE A LOT OF MYSTERY BOOKS AND STUFF LIKE THAT, RIGHT?
MIND IF I BORROW SOME?
... SURE.
NO PROBLEM.
CLAP
CLAP
ALL RIGHT. GROUP UP, Y'ALL.

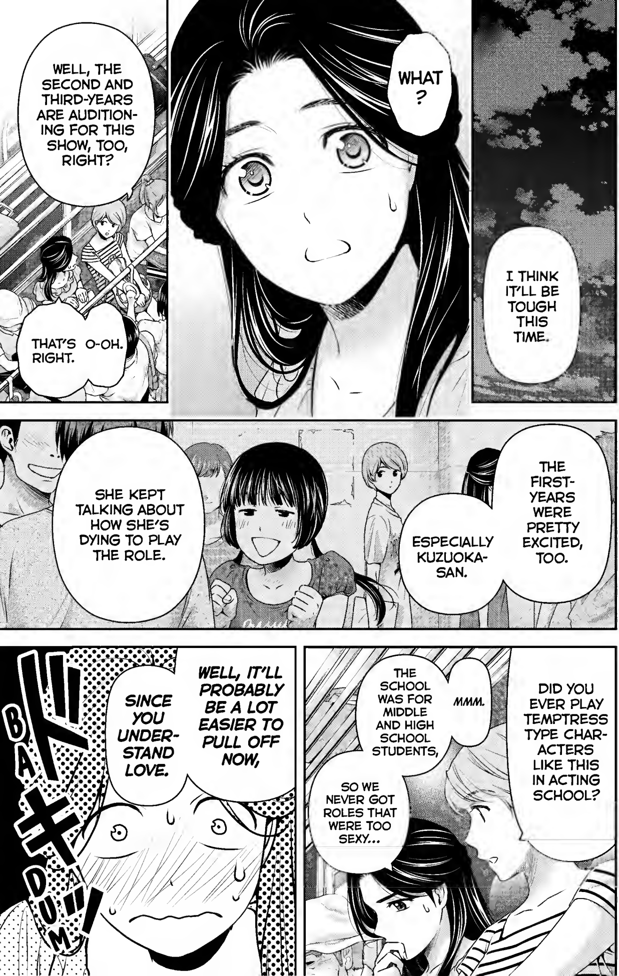

DOES EVERYONE HAVE A COPY?
WE'LL BE GOING OVER OUR NEXT PLAY NOW.
WE'RE AIMING TO PUT IT ON IN NOVEMBER,
DURING THE SCHOOL FESTIVAL.
WE GET A BIG CROWD EVERY YEAR SINCE IT'S ON CAMPUS AND THE TICKETS ARE CHEAP.
LET'S DO OUR BEST TO PUT ON A SHOW THAT'LL BLOW 'EM AWAY.
I'LL LET OUR PLAYWRIGHT EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT.
THE FLOOR'S YOURS, HANA.
M'KAY!
UM... THE STORY'S SET IN A 70'S CABARET THIS TIME.
I THOUGHT WE MIGHT GO WITH A SEXY TONE,
AND TOSS IN SOME MUSIC AND DANCE NUMBERS TO MAKE A LIGHT-HEARTED, FUN SHOW.

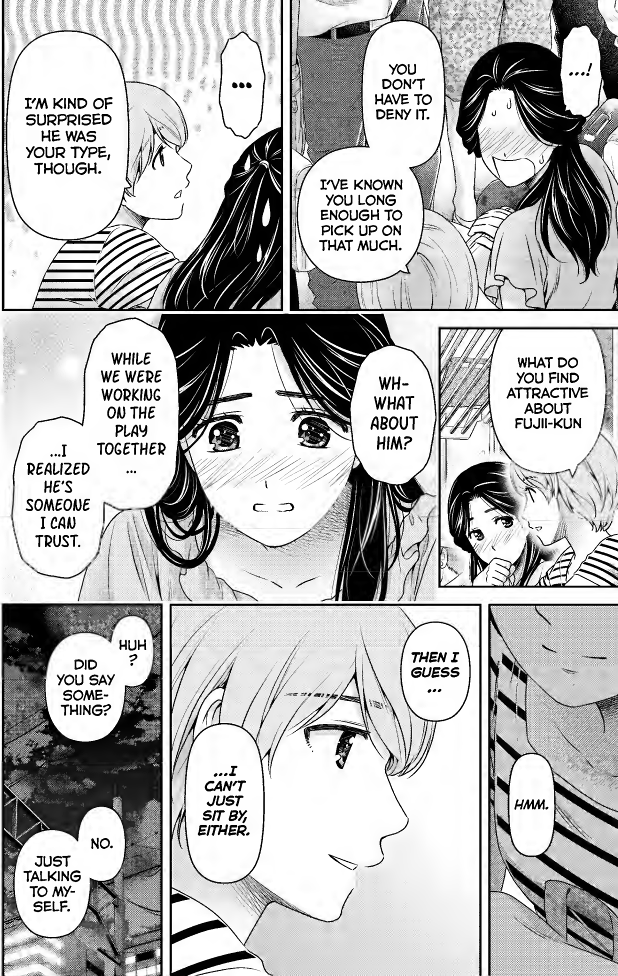

THE PROTAGONIST IS A DETECTIVE.
HE GETS HIRED TO INVESTIGATE SOME SHADY RUMORS SURROUNDING THE CABARET'S PROPRIETRESS.
BUT GETTING INVOLVED WITH HER ENDS UP BACKFIRING AND LANDS HIM IN ALL KINDS OF TROUBLE.
THAT'S THE GIST OF IT.
I'M GOING TO HAMMER OUT THE DETAILS AS WE GO, SO BEAR WITH ME IF IT ENDS UP COMPLETELY DIFFERENT!
HEY...
AH HA HA HA
INCREDIBLE.
I CAN ALREADY TELL IT'LL BE GOOD JUST FROM THE SUMMARY.
THE CHARACTERS ARE ALL UNIQUE AND LIKEABLE.
THIS STORY COULD TOTALLY WORK AS A FULL BOOK, OR EVEN A DRAMA...
IT REALLY IS SUCH A WASTE...
THE KEY CHARACTER IS THIS PROPRIETRESS.
SHE'S A SUBTLE SEDUCTRESS...
...WHO CAN PUT ANY MAN UNDER HER SPELL.
ACTORS, I WANT YOU TO WORK WITH THAT IN MIND.
WE'LL ANNOUNCE AN AUDITION DATE LATER.

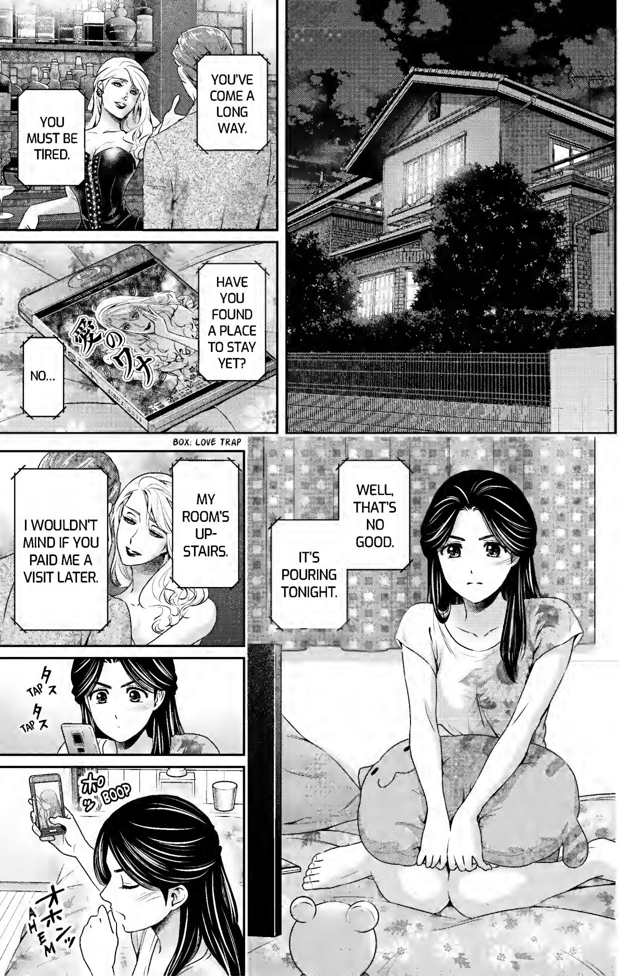

HANA-SEMPAI'S AMAZING.
I BET THIS IS WHAT THEY MEAN BY A "MARKETABLE BOOK."
SOMETHING WITH PUZZLES TO SOLVE,
AND HEAVY ON THE CROWD-PLEASING STUFF.
F-
FUJII-KUN.
MAYBE I SHOULD ASK HER FOR SOME ADVICE ON STORY-BUILDING SOMETIME.
FUJII-KUN.
HELLO?
HUH?!
ER... HUH?
SERIZAWA?
WHY ARE YOU STANDING SO FAR AWAY?
W-WELL, YOU TURNED AROUND ALL OF A SUDDEN.
YOU STARTLED ME...


IS IT REALLY THAT "SUDDEN" TO TURN AROUND WHEN SOMEONE TALKS TO YOU?
ARE YOU ...
...INVOLVED IN WRITING THE SCRIPT THIS TIME?
OH ...
NAH. IT SOUNDS LIKE HANA-SEMPAI'S IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING...
...SO I PLAN TO HELP HER OUT BY GATHERING MATERIAL AND STUFF.
I SEE ...
I BET YOU'RE GLAD HANA-SEMPAI'S THE PLAYWRIGHT THIS TIME, HUH?
YOU JOINED FORESTER BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO ACT IN ONE OF HER SHOWS, RIGHT?
MUMBLE ぼそ
N- NOT ANYMORE ...
MUMBLE ぼそ
I LIKE YOUR SCRIPTS, TOO...
ぼそ MUMBLE
HUH ?
I... I THINK YOUR...!

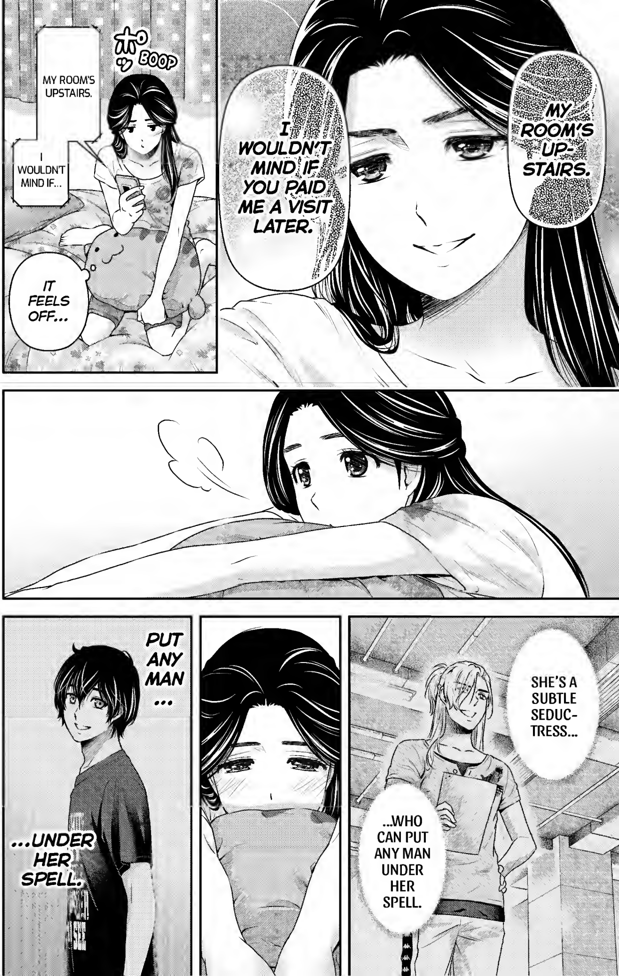

POOF
ぽ!!
ふっ
FWIP
くるっ
SLAP
SLAP
SLAP
NEVER MIND!
WHAT'S WITH HER?!
ARE YOU SHOOTING FOR THE LEAD AGAIN?
BUT OF COURSE.
I PLAN TO AUDITION FOR IT.
I'M KINDA LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.
Y-
YOU ARE?
I MEAN, YOU DON'T REALLY COME OFF AS SEDUCTIVE, Y'KNOW?
BUT WITH YOUR SKILLS, I'M SURE YOU CAN PULL IT OFF.
I'D LIKE TO SEE IT FOR MYSELF.


I THINK IT'LL BE TOUGH THIS TIME.
WHAT?
WELL, THE SECOND AND THIRD-YEARS ARE AUDITIONING FOR THIS SHOW, TOO, RIGHT?
O-OH.
THAT'S RIGHT.
THE FIRST-YEARS WERE PRETTY EXCITED, TOO.
ESPECIALLY KUZUOKA-SAN.
SHE KEPT TALKING ABOUT HOW SHE'S DYING TO PLAY THE ROLE.
DID YOU EVER PLAY TEMPTRESS TYPE CHARACTERS LIKE THIS IN ACTING SCHOOL?
MMM.
THE SCHOOL WAS FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,
SO WE NEVER GOT ROLES THAT WERE TOO SEXY...
WELL, IT'LL PROBABLY BE A LOT EASIER TO PULL OFF NOW,
SINCE YOU UNDERSTAND LOVE.
BA-DUM!!


...!
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DENY IT.
I'VE KNOWN YOU LONG ENOUGH TO PICK UP ON THAT MUCH.
...
I'M KIND OF SURPRISED HE WAS YOUR TYPE, THOUGH.
WHAT DO YOU FIND ATTRACTIVE ABOUT FUJII-KUN
WH- WHAT ABOUT HIM?
WHILE WE WERE WORKING ON THE PLAY TOGETHER...
...I REALIZED HE'S SOMEONE I CAN TRUST.
HMM.
THEN I GUESS...
...I CAN'T JUST SIT BY, EITHER.
HUH?
DID YOU SAY SOMETHING?
NO.
JUST TALKING TO MYSELF.


YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY.
YOU MUST BE TIRED.
HAVE YOU FOUND A PLACE TO STAY YET?
NO...
愛のワナ
WELL, THAT'S NO GOOD.
IT'S POURING TONIGHT.
MY ROOM'S UPSTAIRS.
I WOULDN'T MIND IF YOU PAID ME A VISIT LATER.
タス TAP
タス TAP
ホッ BOOP
オホンッ AHEM

BOX: LOVE TRAP

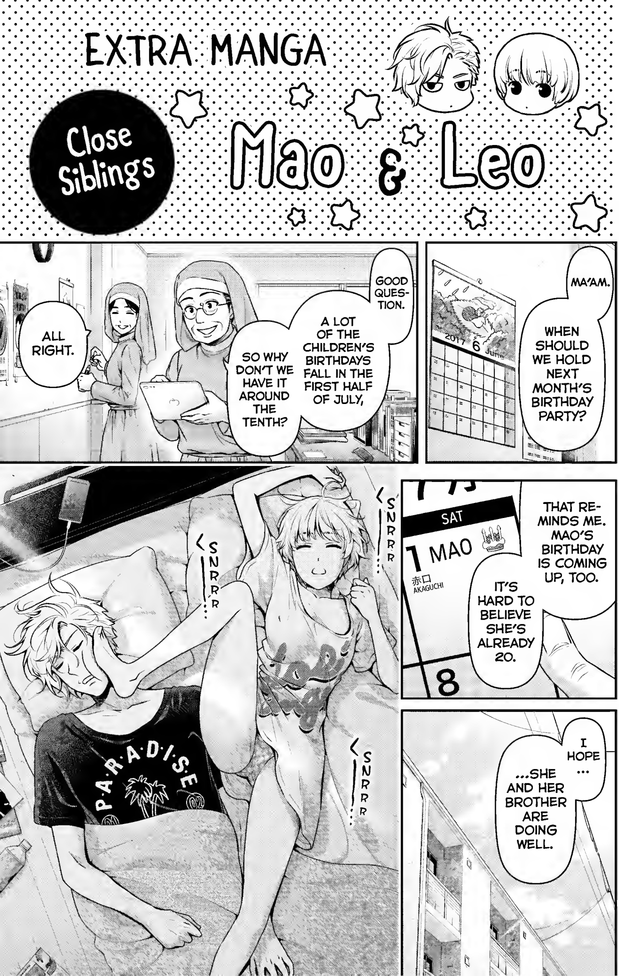

MY ROOM'S UPSTAIRS.
I WOULDN'T MIND IF YOU PAID ME A VISIT LATER.
ポッ BOOP
MY ROOM'S UPSTAIRS.
I WOULDN'T MIND IF...
IT FEELS OFF...
SHE'S A SUBTLE SEDUCTRESS...
...WHO CAN PUT ANY MAN UNDER HER SPELL.
PUT ANY MAN ...
...UNDER HER SPELL.

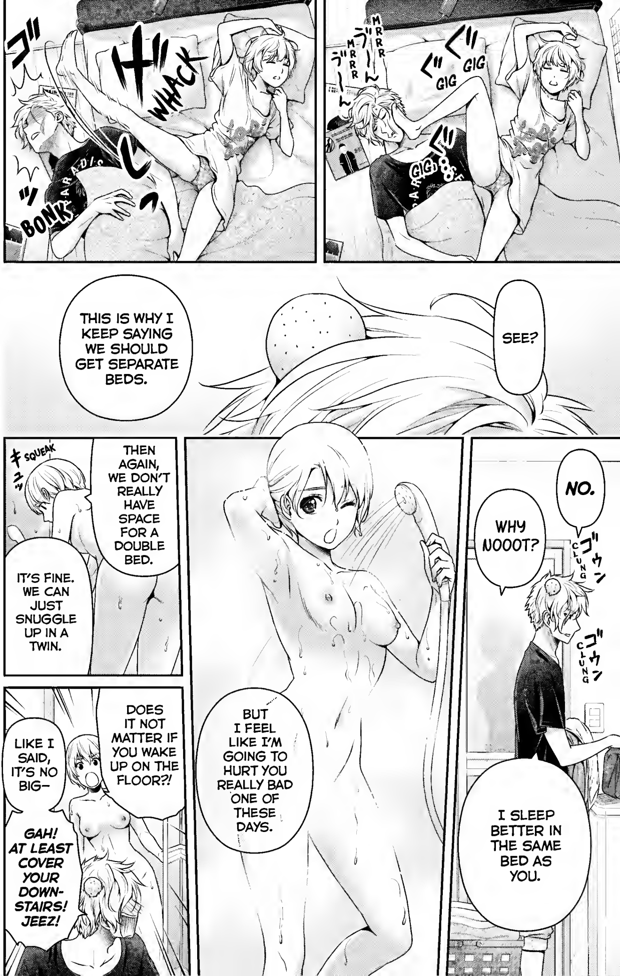
ギシッ
CREAK...
スル
SLIP
パサッ
RUFL

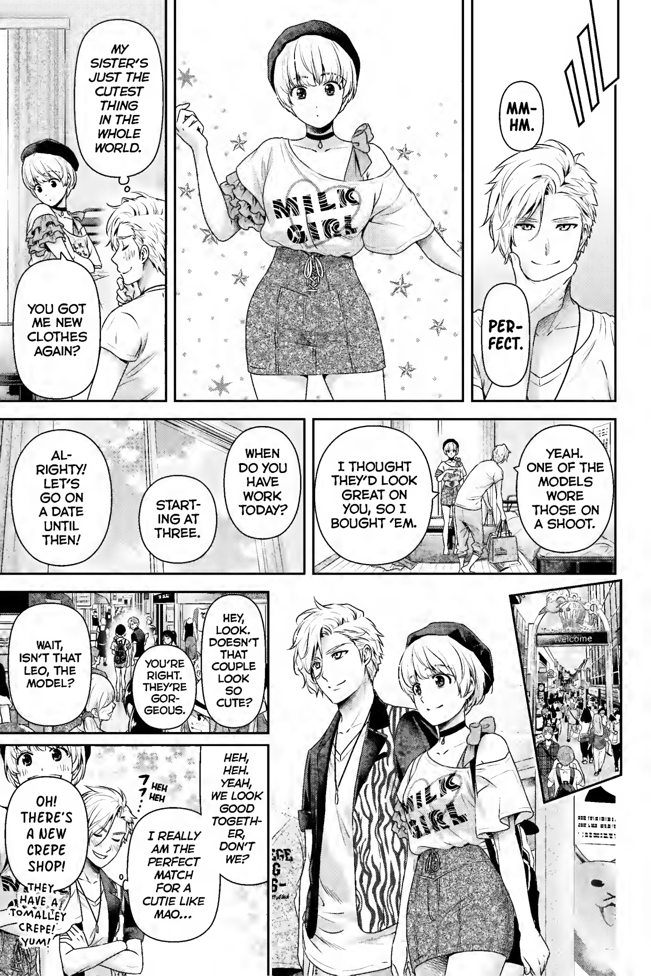
## EXTRA MANGA

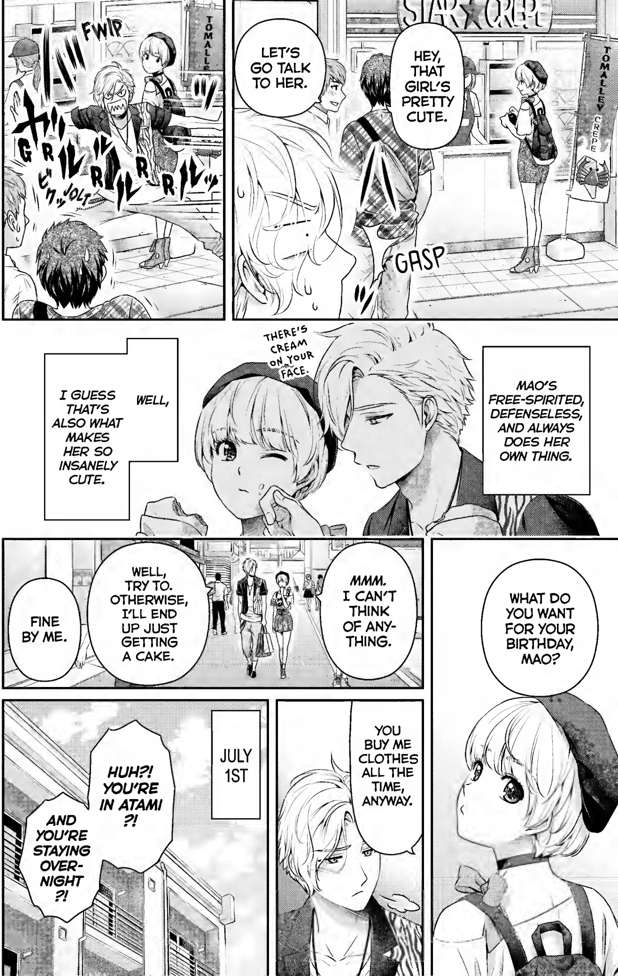
# Mao & Leo

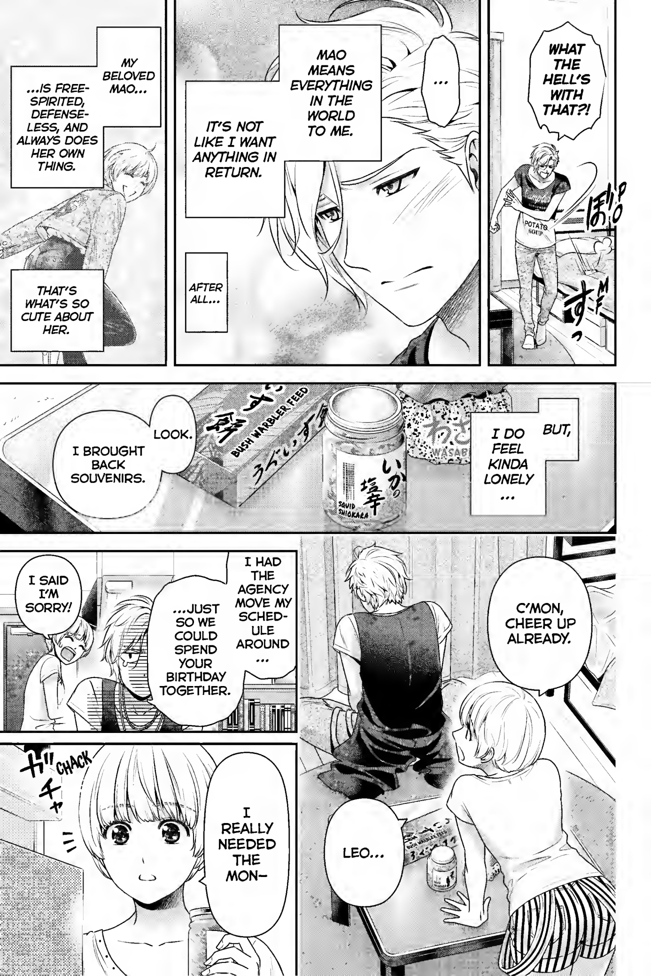
### Close Siblings

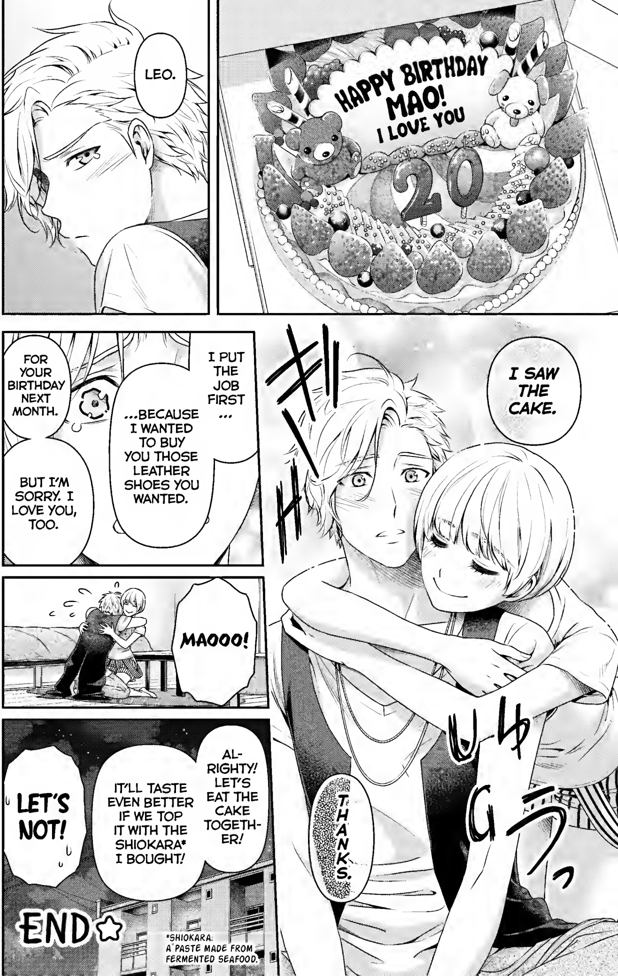

MA'AM.
WHEN SHOULD WE HOLD NEXT MONTH'S BIRTHDAY PARTY?
2017 6 June
GOOD QUESTION.
A LOT OF THE CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAYS FALL IN THE FIRST HALF OF JULY,
SO WHY DON'T WE HAVE IT AROUND THE TENTH?
ALL RIGHT.
SAT
1 MAO
赤口
AKAGUCHI
8
THAT REMINDS ME. MAO'S BIRTHDAY IS COMING UP, TOO.
IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE SHE'S ALREADY 20.
I HOPE...
...SHE AND HER BROTHER ARE DOING WELL.
SNRRR...
SNRRR...
SNRRR...
PARADISE


ぶーん MRRR
ぶーん MRRR
ぐ GIG
ぐ GIG
ぐ GIG
ガッ WHACK
ゴ
ゴッ BONK
SEE?
THIS IS WHY I KEEP SAYING WE SHOULD GET SEPARATE BEDS.
NO.
WHY NOOOT?
ゴウン CLUNG
ゴウン CLUNG
I SLEEP BETTER IN THE SAME BED AS YOU.
BUT I FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO HURT YOU REALLY BAD ONE OF THESE DAYS.
キュッ SQUEAK
THEN AGAIN, WE DON'T REALLY HAVE SPACE FOR A DOUBLE BED.
IT'S FINE. WE CAN JUST SNUGGLE UP IN A TWIN.
DOES IT NOT MATTER IF YOU WAKE UP ON THE FLOOR?!
LIKE I SAID, IT'S NO BIG–
GAH! AT LEAST COVER YOUR DOWNSTAIRS! JEEZ!


MM-HM.
PERFECT.
MILK GIRL
MY SISTER'S JUST THE CUTEST THING IN THE WHOLE WORLD.
YOU GOT ME NEW CLOTHES AGAIN?
YEAH. ONE OF THE MODELS WORE THOSE ON A SHOOT.
I THOUGHT THEY'D LOOK GREAT ON YOU, SO I BOUGHT 'EM.
WHEN DO YOU HAVE WORK TODAY?
STARTING AT THREE.
ALRIGHTY! LET'S GO ON A DATE UNTIL THEN!
Welcome
HEY, LOOK. DOESN'T THAT COUPLE LOOK SO CUTE?
YOU'RE RIGHT. THEY'RE GORGEOUS.
WAIT, ISN'T THAT LEO, THE MODEL?
HEH, HEH. YEAH, WE LOOK GOOD TOGETHER, DON'T WE?
HEH HEH
I REALLY AM THE PERFECT MATCH FOR A CUTIE LIKE MAO...
OH! THERE'S A NEW CREPE SHOP!
THEY HAVE A TOMALLEY CREPE! YUM!


STAR CREPE
TOMALLEY CREPE
HEY, THAT GIRL'S PRETTY CUTE.
LET'S GO TALK TO HER.
GASP
TOMALLE
FWIP
GRRRRR
ビクッ JOLT
MAO'S FREE-SPIRITED, DEFENSELESS, AND ALWAYS DOES HER OWN THING.
THERE'S CREAM ON YOUR FACE.
WELL,
I GUESS THAT'S ALSO WHAT MAKES HER SO INSANELY CUTE.
WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY, MAO?
MMM. I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING.
WELL, TRY TO. OTHERWISE, I'LL END UP JUST GETTING A CAKE.
FINE BY ME.
YOU BUY ME CLOTHES ALL THE TIME, ANYWAY.
JULY 1ST
HUH?! YOU'RE IN ATAMI?!
AND YOU'RE STAYING OVERNIGHT?!


WHAT THE HELL'S WITH THAT?!
POTATO SOUP
ぽいっ POI
すっ MF
...
MAO MEANS EVERYTHING IN THE WORLD TO ME.
IT'S NOT LIKE I WANT ANYTHING IN RETURN.
AFTER ALL...
MY BELOVED MAO...
...IS FREE-SPIRITED, DEFENSELESS, AND ALWAYS DOES HER OWN THING.
THAT'S WHAT'S SO CUTE ABOUT HER.
BUT, I DO FEEL KINDA LONELY...
わさび WASABI
いかの塩辛 SQUID SHIOKARA
うぐいす餌 BUSH WARBLER FEED
LOOK. I BROUGHT BACK SOUVENIRS.
C'MON, CHEER UP ALREADY.
LEO...
I HAD THE AGENCY MOVE MY SCHEDULE AROUND...
...JUST SO WE COULD SPEND YOUR BIRTHDAY TOGETHER.
I SAID I'M SORRY!
ガチャ CHACK
I REALLY NEEDED THE MON–


HAPPY BIRTHDAY MAO! I LOVE YOU
20
LEO.
I SAW THE CAKE.
THANKS.
I PUT THE JOB FIRST...
...BECAUSE I WANTED TO BUY YOU THOSE LEATHER SHOES YOU WANTED.
FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY NEXT MONTH.
BUT I'M SORRY. I LOVE YOU, TOO.
MAOOO!
ALRIGHTY! LET'S EAT THE CAKE TOGETHER!
IT'LL TASTE EVEN BETTER IF WE TOP IT WITH THE SHIOKARA* I BOUGHT!
LET'S NOT!
END☆

*SHIOKARA: A PASTE MADE FROM FERMENTED SEAFOOD.

## DOME X GIRL

Preview

# Secret "Feelings" Revealed.

The New Love Triangle Takes a Shocking Turn!

THEY CAN'T GO BACK TO BEING JUST FRIENDS. AFTER SAYING GOODBYE TO MIYABI, YUKA DISAPPEARS...

IF ONLY I COULD'VE ...
... BEEN LIKE YOU.
AAH ...
TH- THAT TICKLES ...!
DON'T WANNA ACCEPT THAT YOUR EX HAS A NEW MAN?

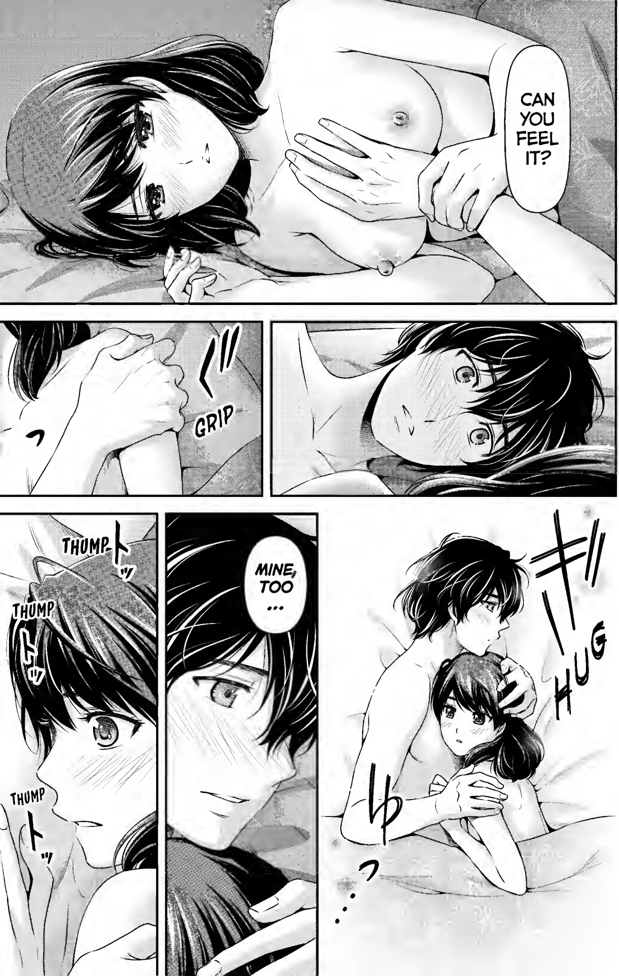
NATSUO TAKES HIS FIRST CRACK AT AN EROTIC NOVEL! ...WAIT. HOW'D IT TURN OUT LIKE THIS?!

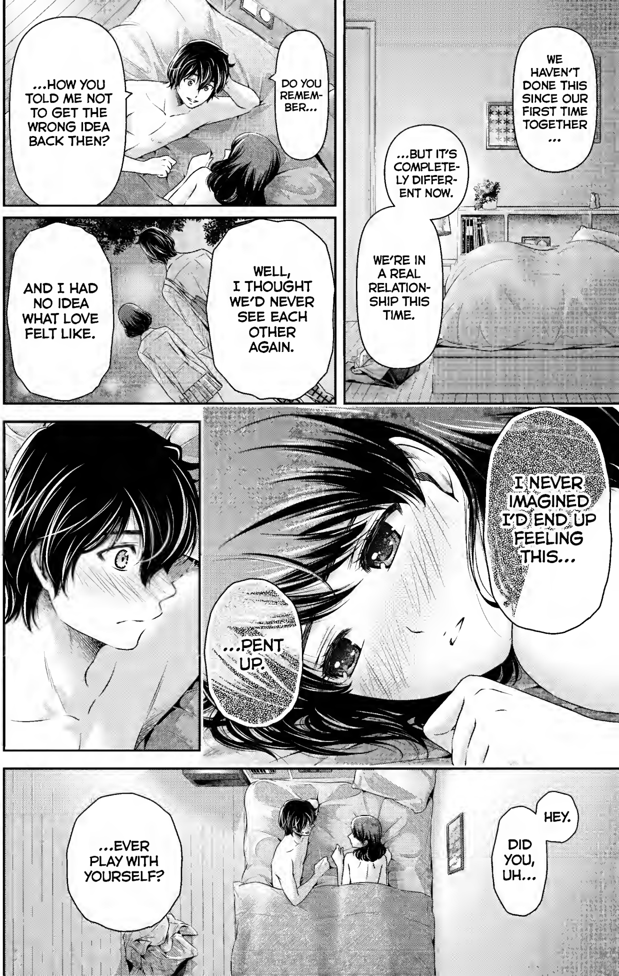
THE DISTANCE SUDDENLY SHRINKS BETWEEN HINA AND TANABE! NATSUO FEELS... CONFLICTED?!

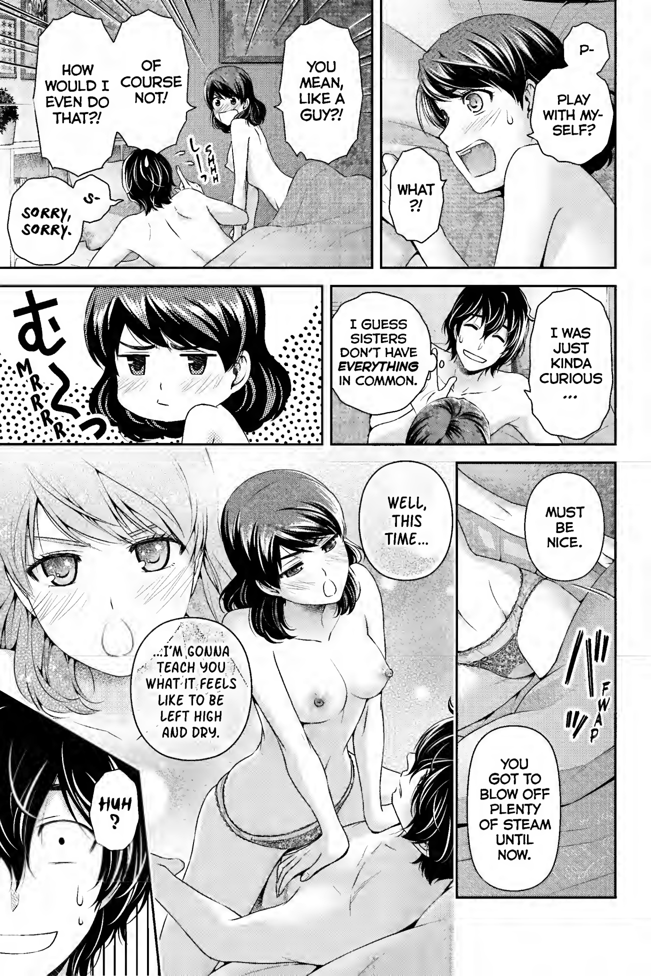
**TO BE CONTINUED IN VOLUME 18!**

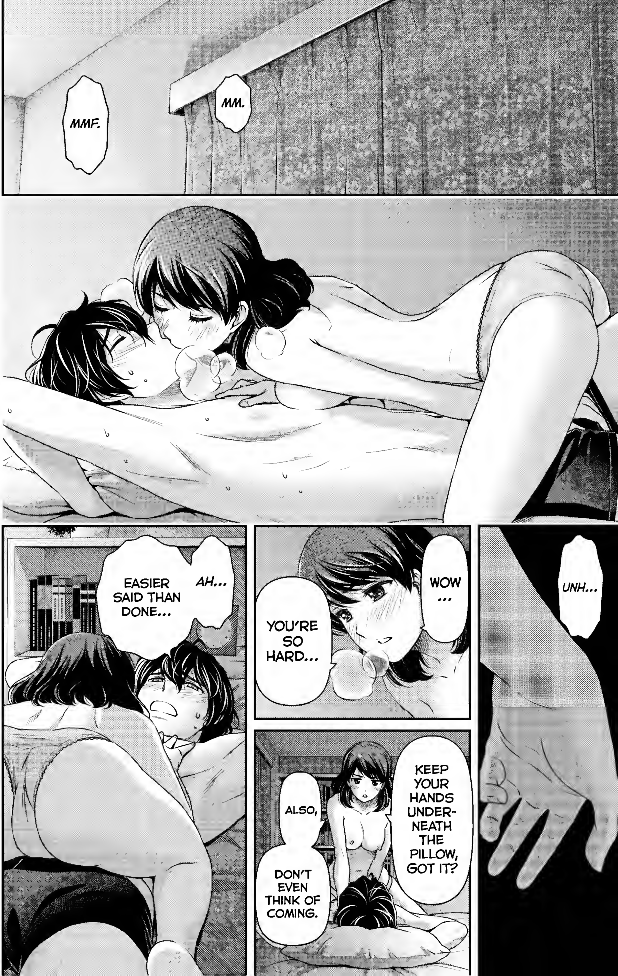
NATSUO
VE LOVE SHOW
Domestic Girlfriend

WOW...
MY HEART'S POUNDING.

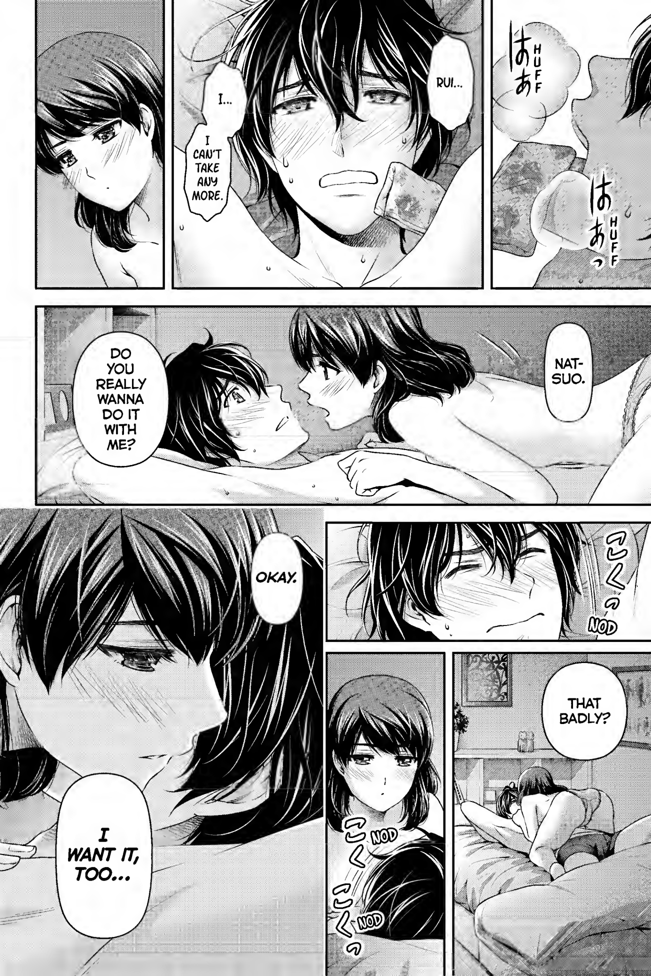

CAN YOU FEEL IT?
ぐ
GRIP
ギュ
HUG
ゅ
っ...
MINE, TOO ...
THUMP トッ
THUMP トッ
THUMP トッ


WE HAVEN'T DONE THIS SINCE OUR FIRST TIME TOGETHER...
...BUT IT'S COMPLETELY DIFFERENT NOW.
WE'RE IN A REAL RELATIONSHIP THIS TIME.
DO YOU REMEMBER...
...HOW YOU TOLD ME NOT TO GET THE WRONG IDEA BACK THEN?
WELL, I THOUGHT WE'D NEVER SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN.
AND I HAD NO IDEA WHAT LOVE FELT LIKE.
I NEVER IMAGINED I'D END UP FEELING THIS...
...PENT UP.
HEY.
DID YOU, UH...
...EVER PLAY WITH YOURSELF?

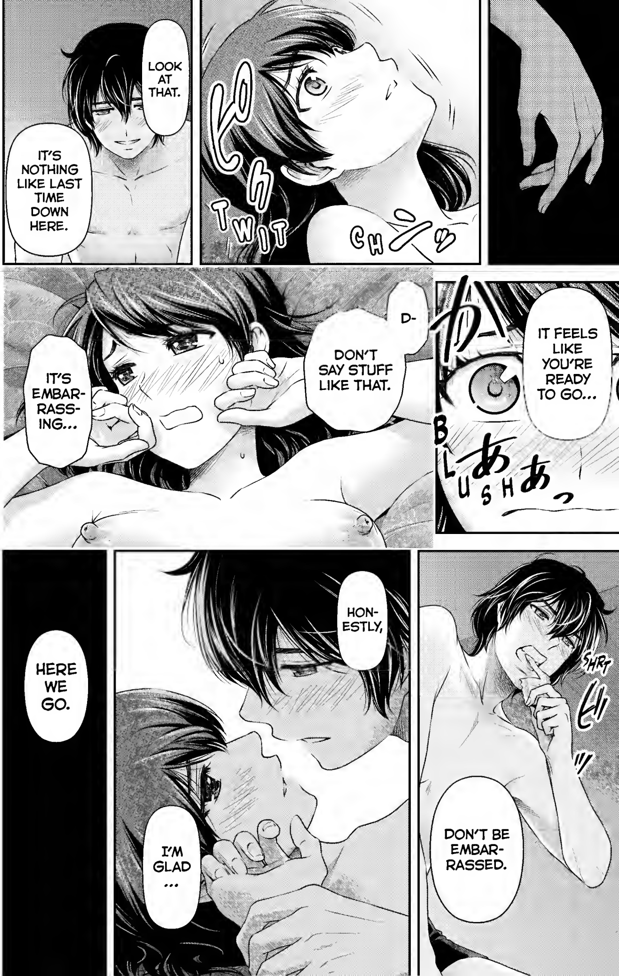

P-
PLAY WITH MY-SELF?
WHAT ?!
YOU MEAN, LIKE A GUY?!
OF COURSE NOT!
HOW WOULD I EVEN DO THAT?!
しーっ SHHH
S- SORRY, SORRY.
I WAS JUST KINDA CURIOUS...
I GUESS SISTERS DON'T HAVE *EVERYTHING* IN COMMON.
むくっ MRRRR
MUST BE NICE.
FWAP
YOU GOT TO BLOW OFF PLENTY OF STEAM UNTIL NOW.
WELL, THIS TIME...
...I'M GONNA TEACH YOU WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE LEFT HIGH AND DRY.
HUH ?


MM.
MMF.
UNH...
WOW...
YOU'RE SO HARD...
KEEP YOUR HANDS UNDERNEATH THE PILLOW, GOT IT?
ALSO,
DON'T EVEN THINK OF COMING.
AH...
EASIER SAID THAN DONE...

HAA...
MMF!
HAH...
AH..!
NNGH!
FRUF
KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN.
WE'LL GET CAUGHT.
MMM...
MRF...
RRF...
MM...


はあ HUFF
はあっ HUFF
RUI...
I...
I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE.
NAT-SUO.
DO YOU REALLY WANNA DO IT WITH ME?
こくっ NOD
THAT BADLY?
こく NOD
こくっ NOD
OKAY.
I WANT IT, TOO...

FW
IP
MM...
PE
にゅっ
GRO
AH!
HEY ...
HUH?
DID HER BOOBS GET BIGGER?

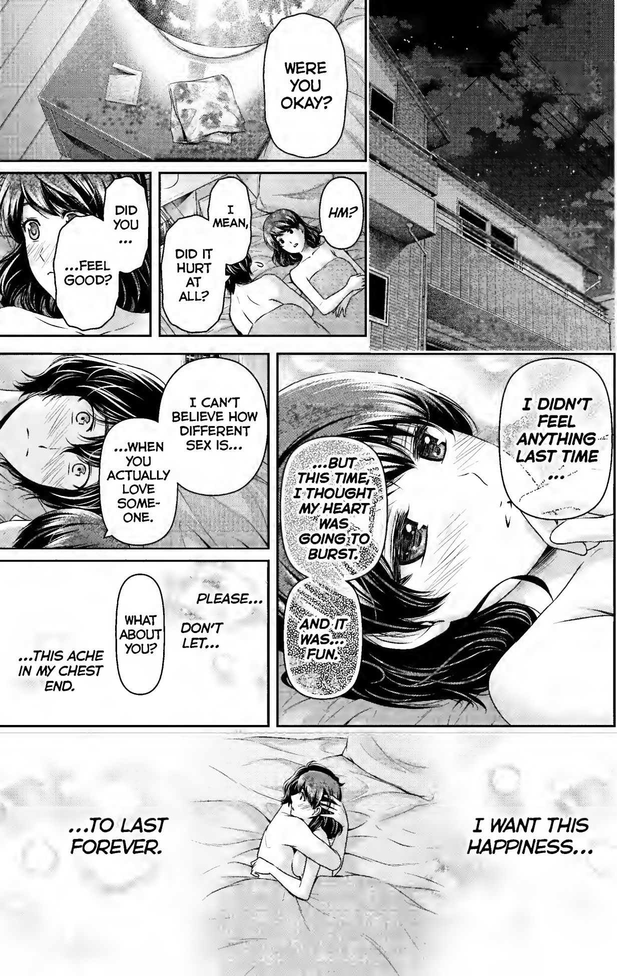

ピクッ
TWIT
CHシッ
LOOK AT THAT.
IT'S NOTHING LIKE LAST TIME DOWN HERE.
かー
IT FEELS LIKE YOU'RE READY TO GO...
BLUSH
あああっ
D-
DON'T SAY STUFF LIKE THAT.
IT'S EMBARRASSING...
SHRT
ビッ
DON'T BE EMBARRASSED.
HONESTLY,
I'M GLAD...
HERE WE GO.

HN
GH
...!
AHH ...!
AH!
NNH ...!
AAH!
MM.
AH!
HAH!
MM.
MMF.

...
...!
MMM!
OH, MAN...
IT'S SO WARM!
I WONDER IF...
...RUI FEELS GOOD, TOO.
...
THROB
SQUEE

NAFUO ...
I RUF YOU...
I RUF YOU...
RUI...
RUI ... I LOVE YOU, TOO!
MM!
AH!
HNN.
MMF!

AAH!
HUFF
ハァ
HUFF
ハァ
HUFF
ハァ


WERE YOU OKAY?
HM?
I MEAN,
DID IT HURT AT ALL?
DID YOU ...
...FEEL GOOD?
I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING LAST TIME ...
...BUT THIS TIME, I THOUGHT MY HEART WAS GOING TO BURST.
AND IT WAS... FUN.
I CAN'T BELIEVE HOW DIFFERENT SEX IS...
...WHEN YOU ACTUALLY LOVE SOMEONE.
PLEASE...
DON'T LET...
WHAT ABOUT YOU?
...THIS ACHE IN MY CHEST END.
I WANT THIS HAPPINESS...
...TO LAST FOREVER.

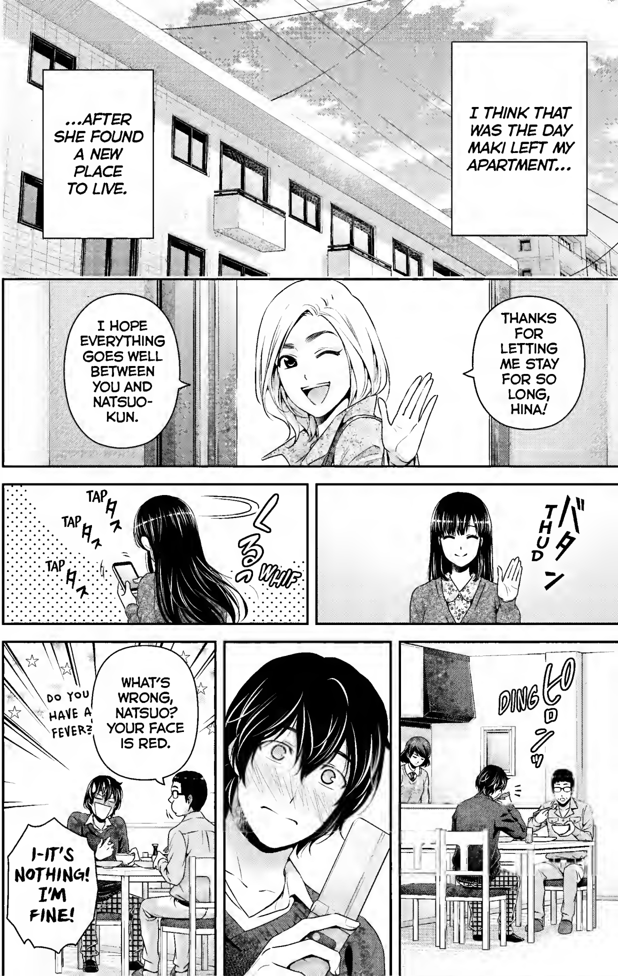
NATSUO × RUI　LOVE LOVE SHOW

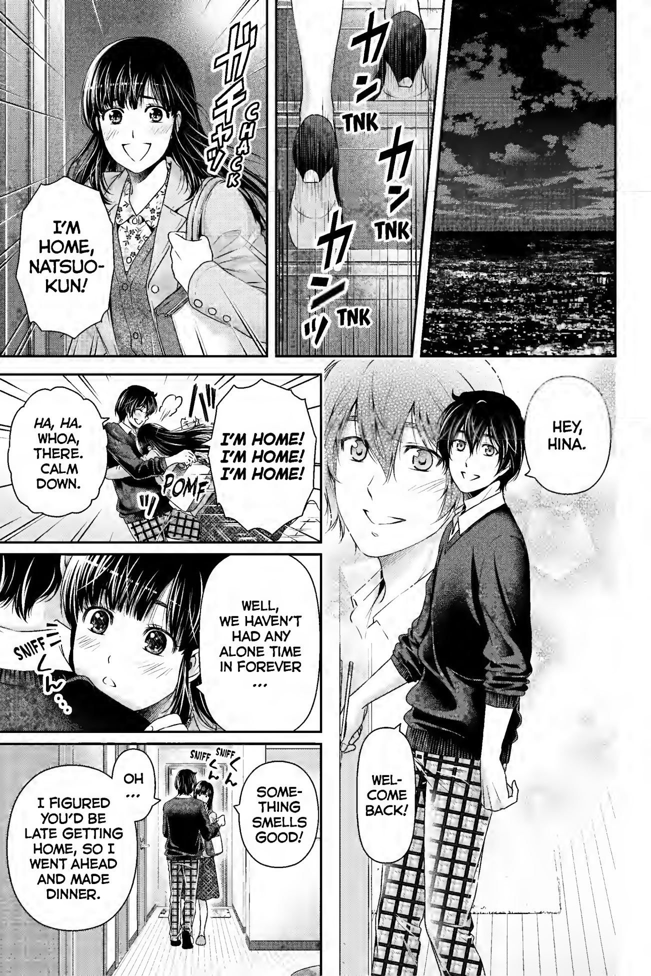
END

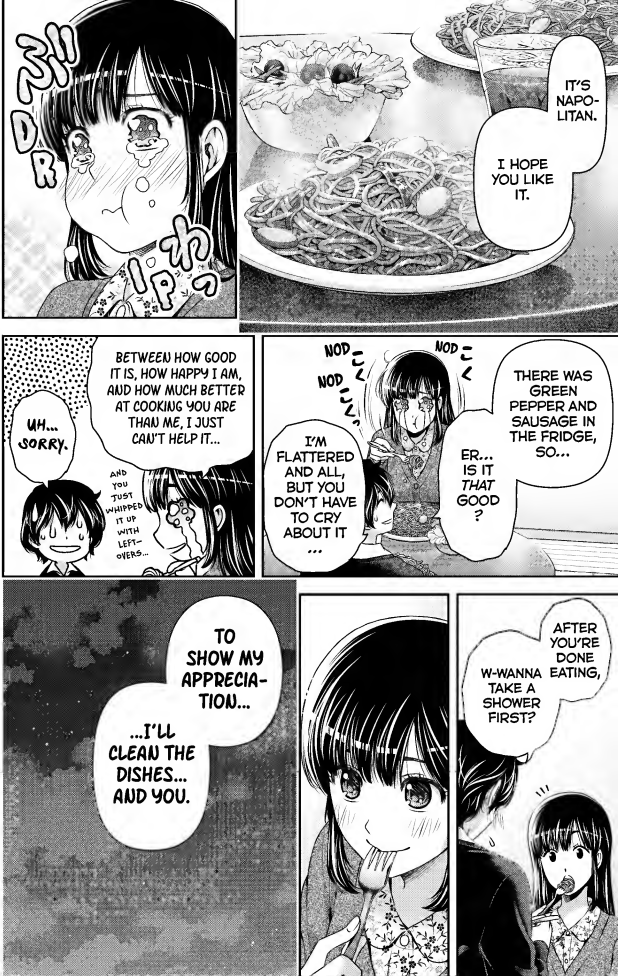
NATSUO×HINA SWEET MEMORIES

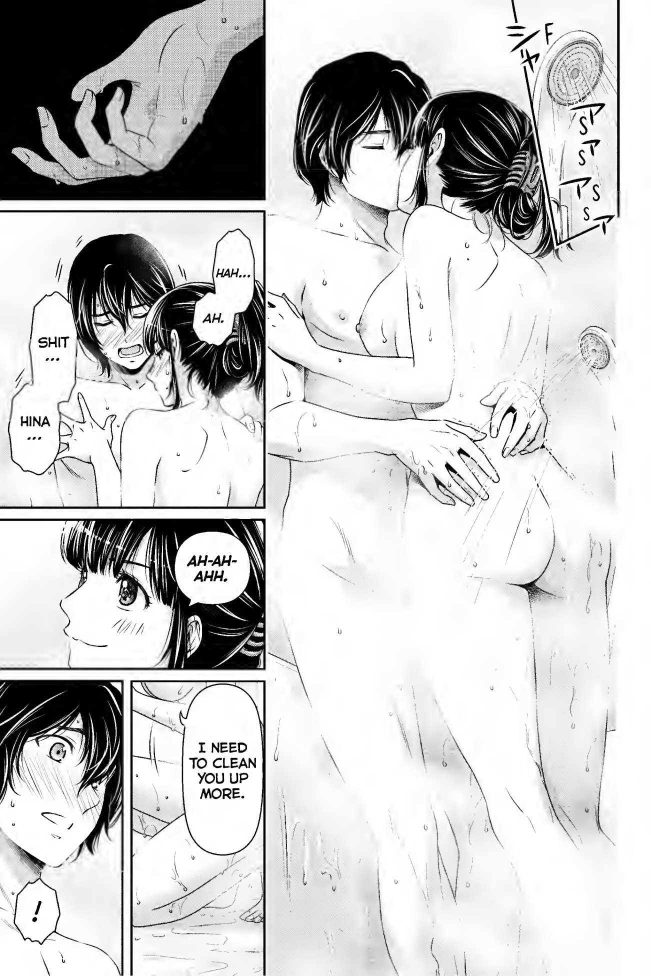
# Domestic Girlfriend

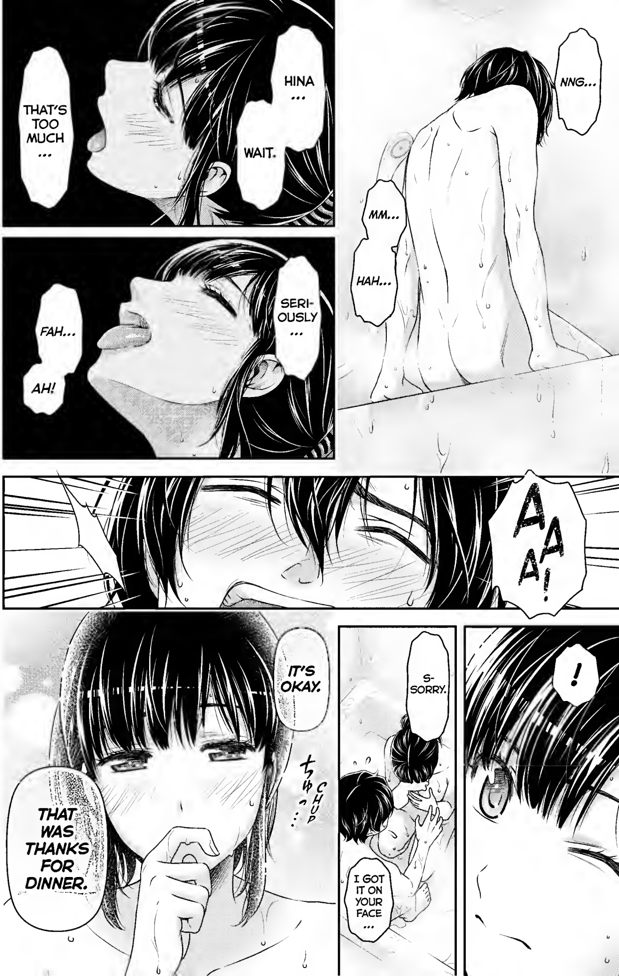
KEI SASUGA

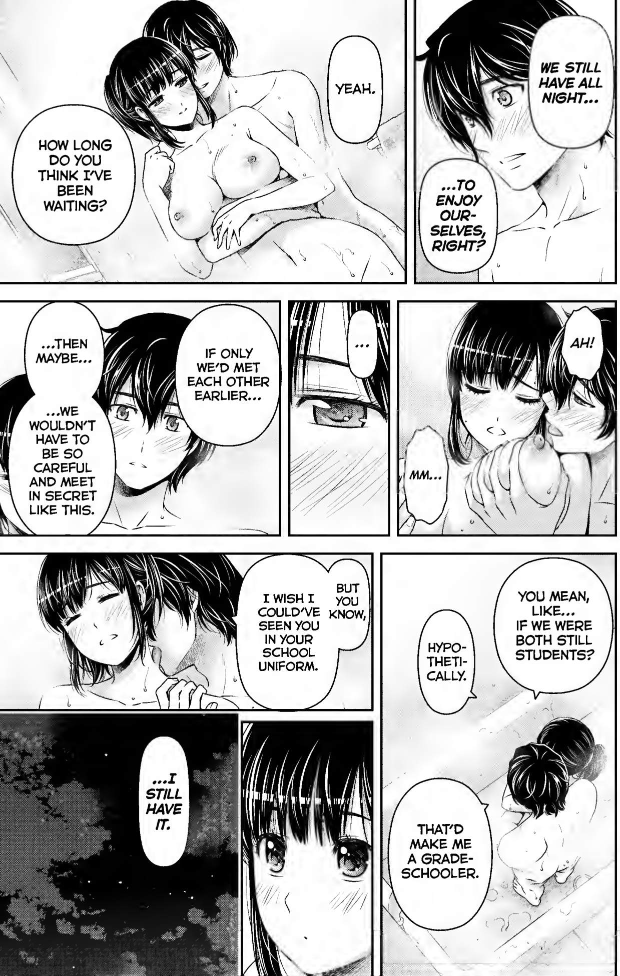

I THINK THAT WAS THE DAY MAKI LEFT MY APARTMENT...
...AFTER SHE FOUND A NEW PLACE TO LIVE.
THANKS FOR LETTING ME STAY FOR SO LONG, HINA!
I HOPE EVERYTHING GOES WELL BETWEEN YOU AND NATSUO-KUN.
バタン THUD
くるっ WHIF
TAP タス
TAP タス
TAP タス
ピロンッ DING
WHAT'S WRONG, NATSUO? YOUR FACE IS RED.
DO YOU HAVE A FEVER?
I-IT'S NOTHING! I'M FINE!

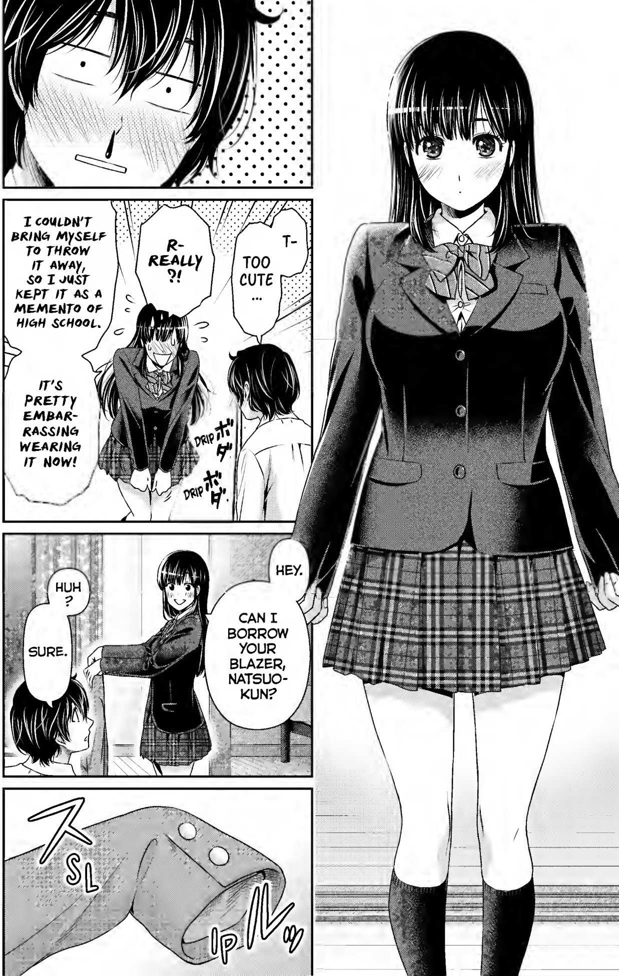

カンTNK
カンTNK
カンッTNK
ガチャッCHACK
I'M HOME, NATSUO-KUN!
HEY, HINA.
WEL-COME BACK!
バ
I'M HOME! I'M HOME! I'M HOME!
POMF
ッ
HA, HA. WHOA, THERE. CALM DOWN.
WELL, WE HAVEN'T HAD ANY ALONE TIME IN FOREVER...
SNIFF くん...
SNIFF くん SNIFF くん
SOME-THING SMELLS GOOD!
OH...
I FIGURED YOU'D BE LATE GETTING HOME, SO I WENT AHEAD AND MADE DINNER.

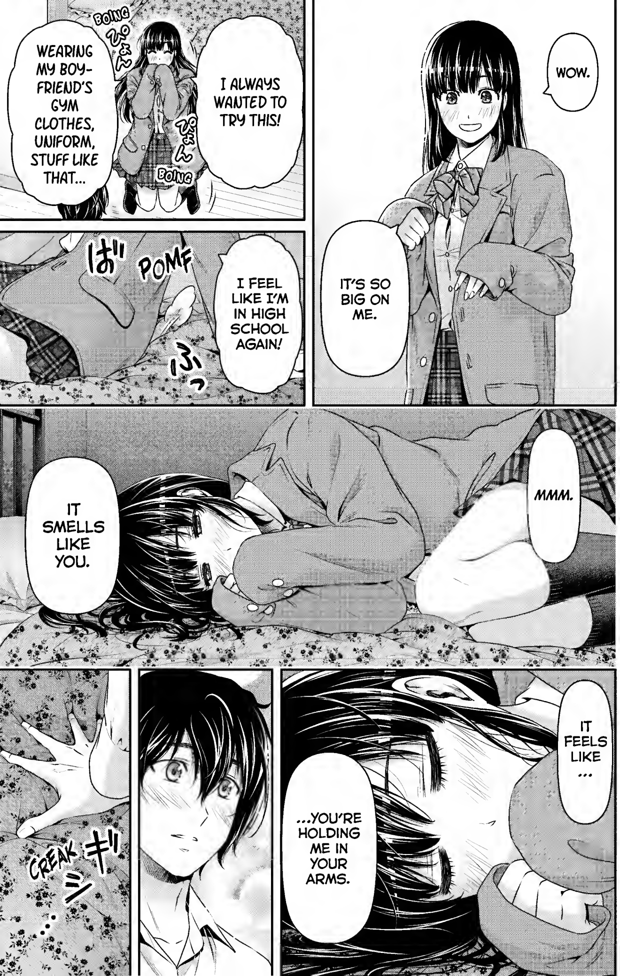

IT'S NAPOLITAN.
I HOPE YOU LIKE IT.
ぶわっ
DRIP
THERE WAS GREEN PEPPER AND SAUSAGE IN THE FRIDGE, SO...
NOD こく
NOD こく
NOD こく
ER... IS IT *THAT* GOOD?
I'M FLATTERED AND ALL, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO CRY ABOUT IT...
BETWEEN HOW GOOD IT IS, HOW HAPPY I AM, AND HOW MUCH BETTER AT COOKING YOU ARE THAN ME, I JUST CAN'T HELP IT...
AND YOU JUST WHIPPED IT UP WITH LEFTOVERS...
UH... SORRY.
AFTER YOU'RE DONE EATING,
W-WANNA TAKE A SHOWER FIRST?
TO SHOW MY APPRECIATION...
...I'LL CLEAN THE DISHES... AND YOU.

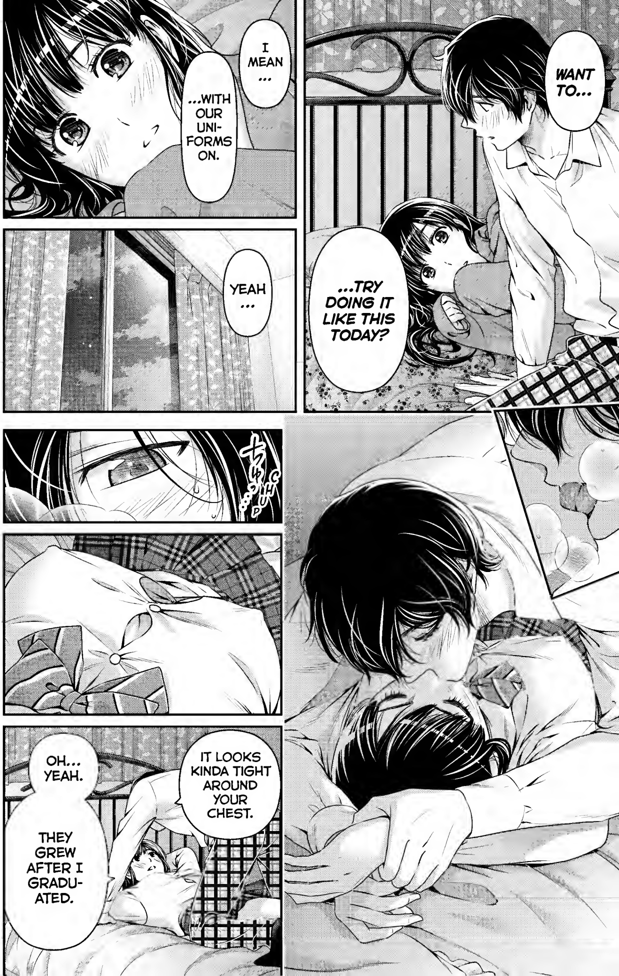

シャー F
S S S S
HAH...
AH.
SHIT...
HINA...
AH-AH-AHH.
I NEED TO CLEAN YOU UP MORE.
!

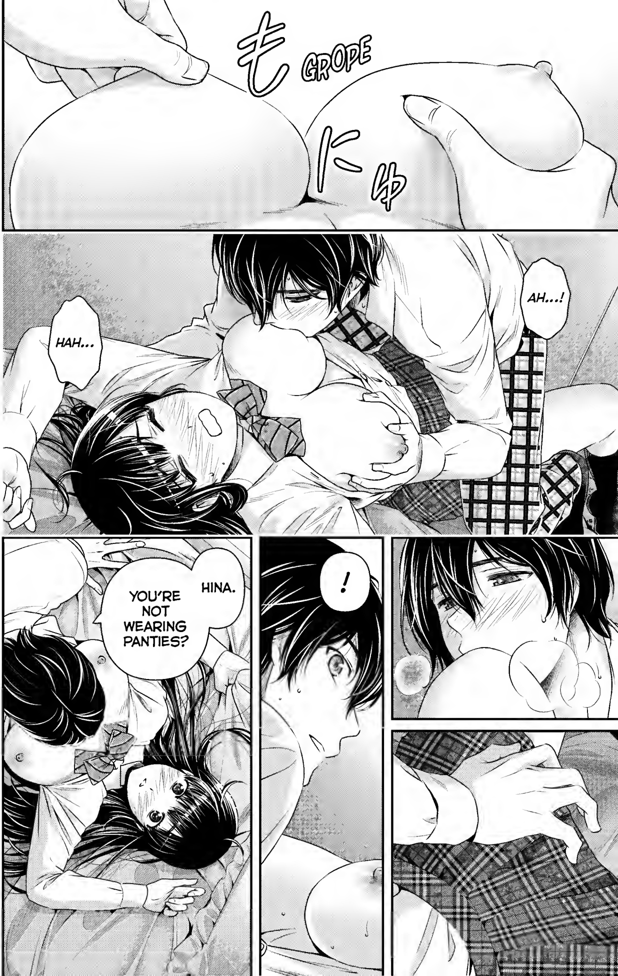

NNG...
MM...
HAH...
HINA...
WAIT.
THAT'S TOO MUCH...
SERIOUSLY...
FAH...
AH!
AAA!
!
S-SORRY.
I GOT IT ON YOUR FACE...
IT'S OKAY.
ちゅっ…
CHUP
THAT WAS THANKS FOR DINNER.

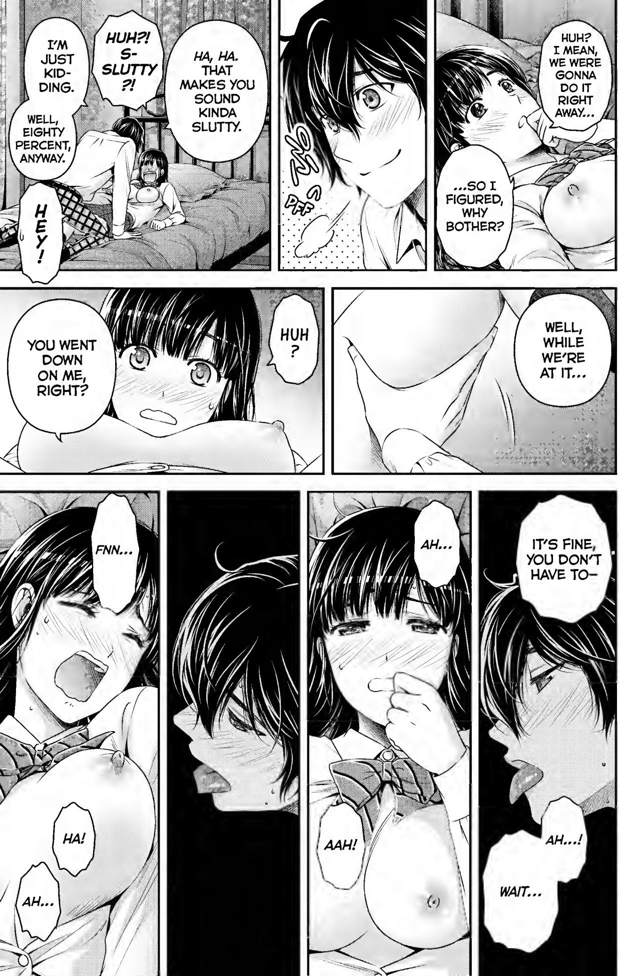

WE STILL HAVE ALL NIGHT...
...TO ENJOY OURSELVES, RIGHT?
YEAH.
HOW LONG DO YOU THINK I'VE BEEN WAITING?
AH!
MM...
...
IF ONLY WE'D MET EACH OTHER EARLIER...
...THEN MAYBE...
...WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO BE SO CAREFUL AND MEET IN SECRET LIKE THIS.
YOU MEAN, LIKE... IF WE WERE BOTH STILL STUDENTS?
HYPOTHETICALLY.
THAT'D MAKE ME A GRADE-SCHOOLER.
BUT YOU KNOW,
I WISH I COULD'VE SEEN YOU IN YOUR SCHOOL UNIFORM.
...I STILL HAVE IT.

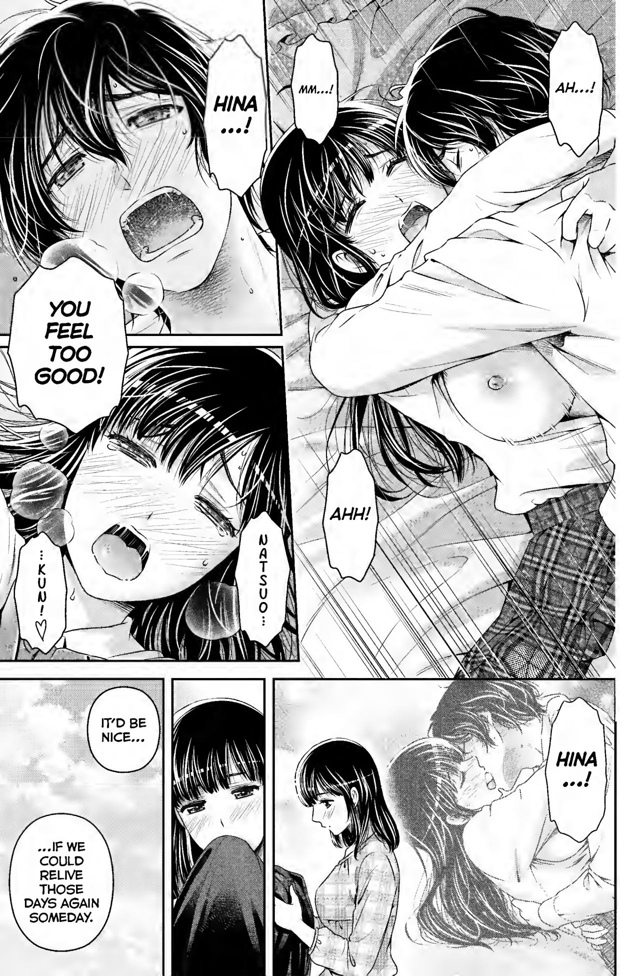

T- TOO CUTE...
R-REALLY?!
I COULDN'T BRING MYSELF TO THROW IT AWAY, SO I JUST KEPT IT AS A MEMENTO OF HIGH SCHOOL.
IT'S PRETTY EMBARRASSING WEARING IT NOW!
DRIP ボダ
DRIP ボダ
HEY.
CAN I BORROW YOUR BLAZER, NATSUO-KUN?
HUH?
SURE.
ス SL
ルッ IP


WOW.
IT'S SO BIG ON ME.
I ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY THIS!
WEARING MY BOYFRIEND'S GYM CLOTHES, UNIFORM, STUFF LIKE THAT...
ぴょん
BOING
ぴょん
BOING
I FEEL LIKE I'M IN HIGH SCHOOL AGAIN!
ば
POMF
ふっ
MMM.
IT SMELLS LIKE YOU.
IT FEELS LIKE ...
...YOU'RE HOLDING ME IN YOUR ARMS.
ギシ
CREAK
...


WANT TO...
...TRY DOING IT LIKE THIS TODAY?
I MEAN...
...WITH OUR UNIFORMS ON.
YEAH...
ちゅっ...
CHUD
IT LOOKS KINDA TIGHT AROUND YOUR CHEST.
OH... YEAH.
THEY GREW AFTER I GRADUATED.


も GROPE
にゅ
AH...!
HAH...
!
HINA.
YOU'RE NOT WEARING PANTIES?


HUH? I MEAN, WE WERE GONNA DO IT RIGHT AWAY...
...SO I FIGURED, WHY BOTHER?
PFF
HA, HA. THAT MAKES YOU SOUND KINDA SLUTTY.
HUH?! S-SLUTTY?!
I'M JUST KID-DING.
WELL, EIGHTY PERCENT, ANYWAY.
HEY!
WELL, WHILE WE'RE AT IT...
YOU WENT DOWN ON ME, RIGHT?
HUH?
IT'S FINE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO—
AH...!
WAIT...
AH...
AAH!
FNN...
HA!
AH...


AH...!
MM...!
HINA...!
YOU FEEL TOO GOOD!
NATSUO...
...KUN! ♡
AHH!
HINA...!
IT'D BE NICE...
...IF WE COULD RELIVE THOSE DAYS AGAIN SOMEDAY.

NATSUO × HINA SWEET MEMORIES

END

**Domestic Girlfriend 17**

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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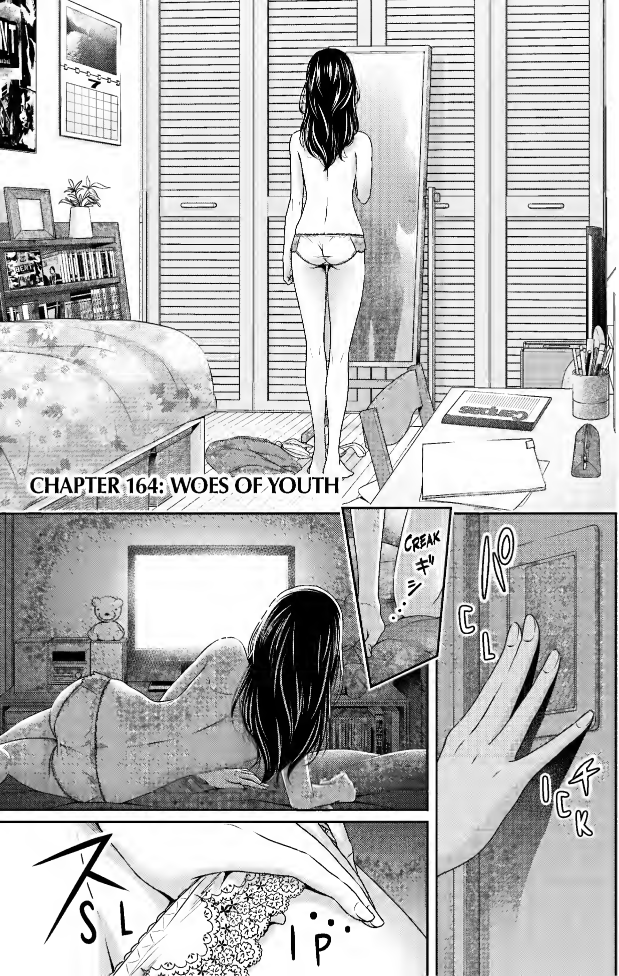
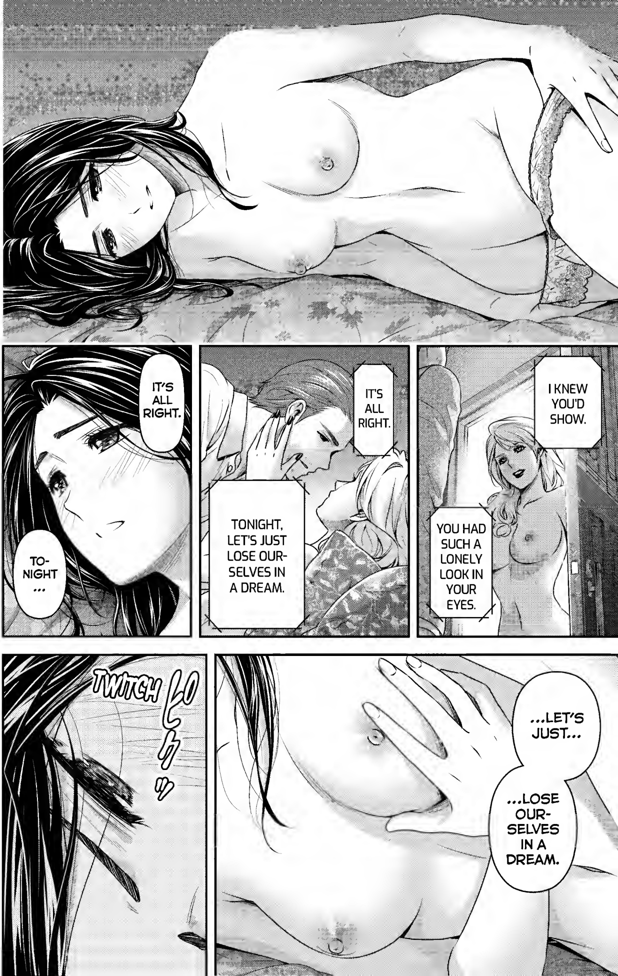
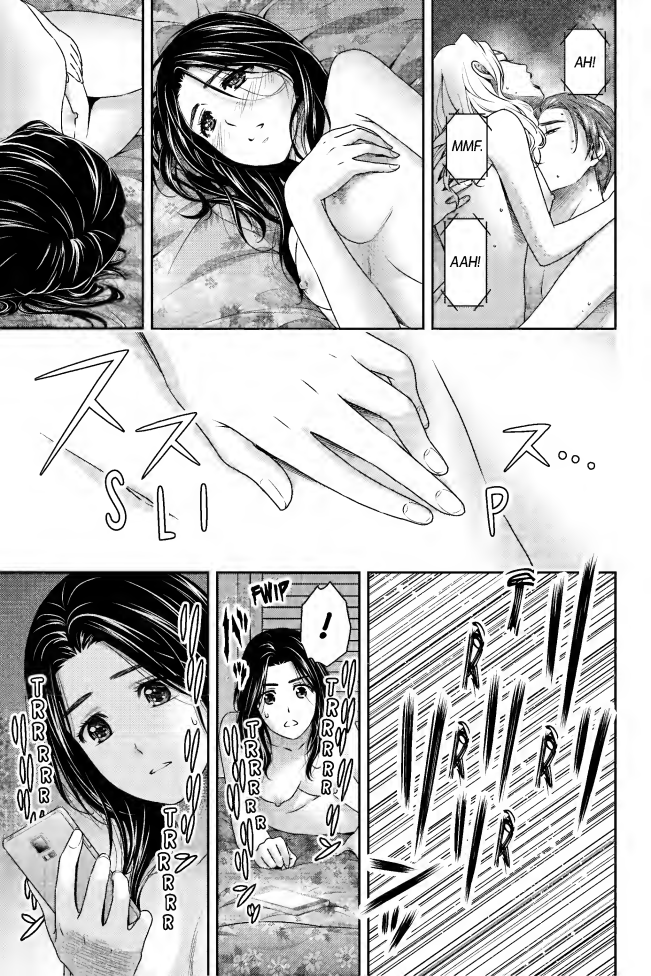
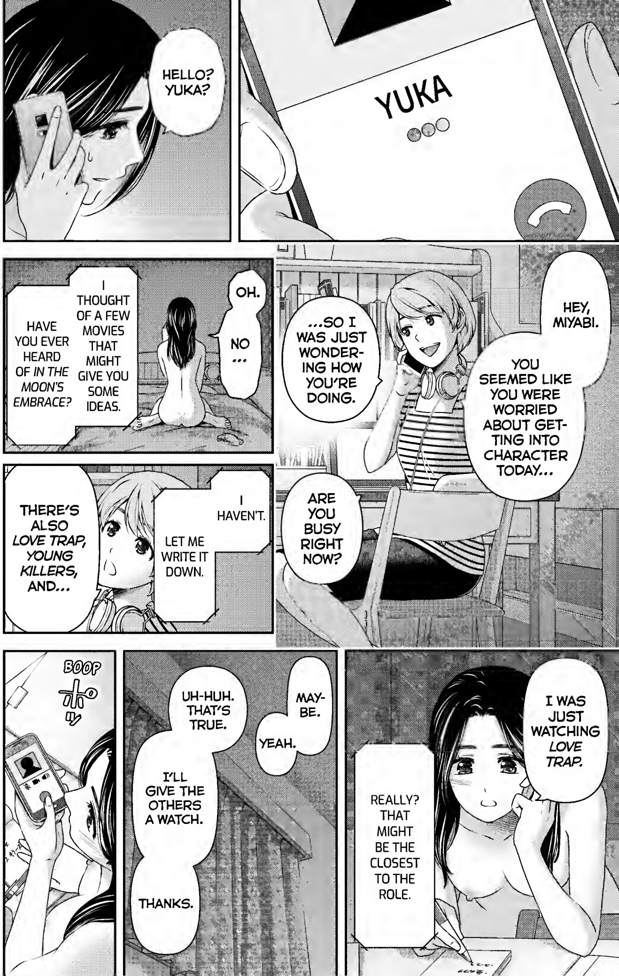
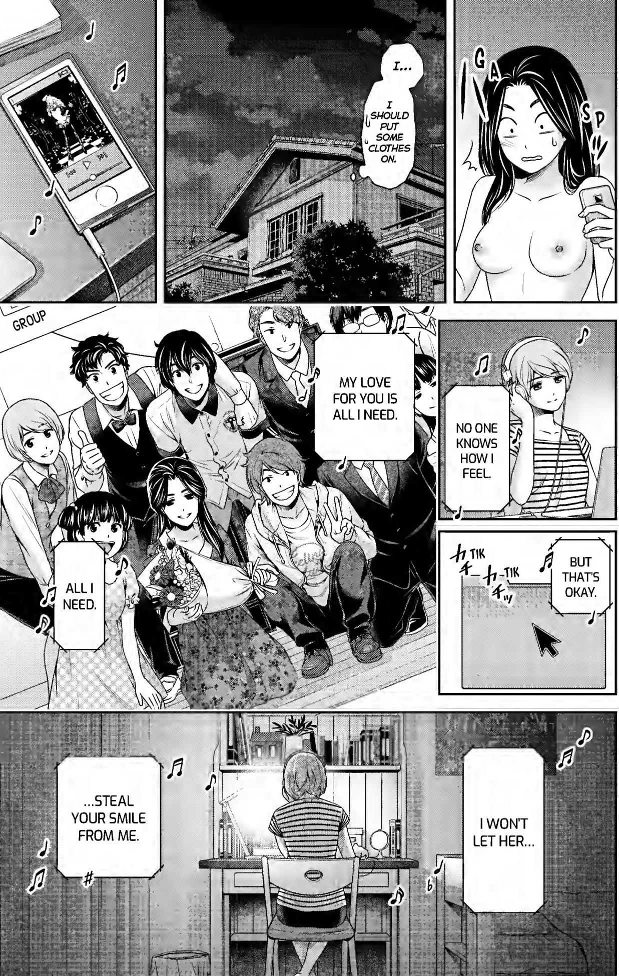
# CHAPTER 164: WOES OF YOUTH

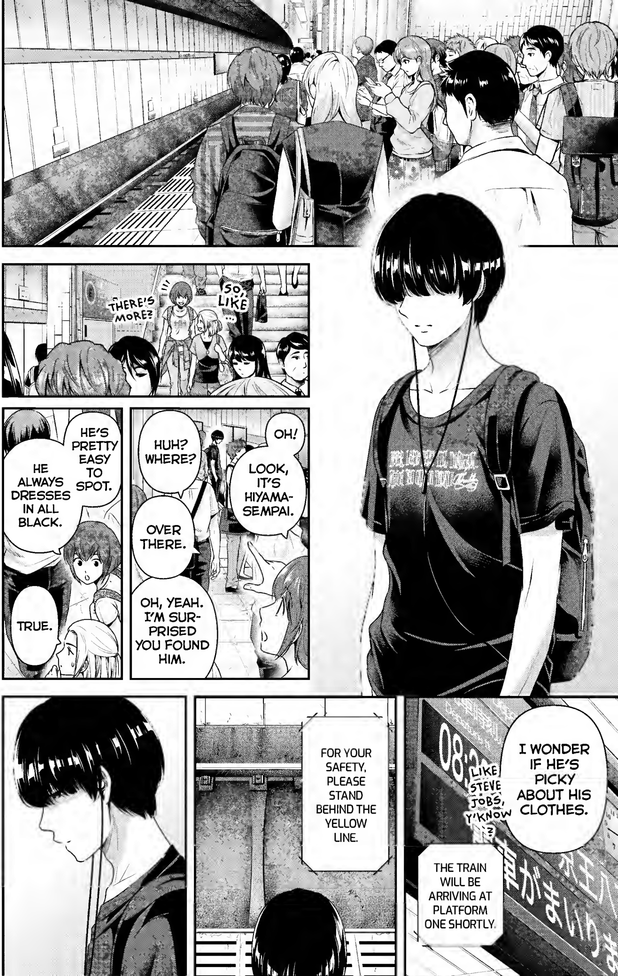

パ
CLICK
チ
CREAK
ギ…シ
ス
SLIP…

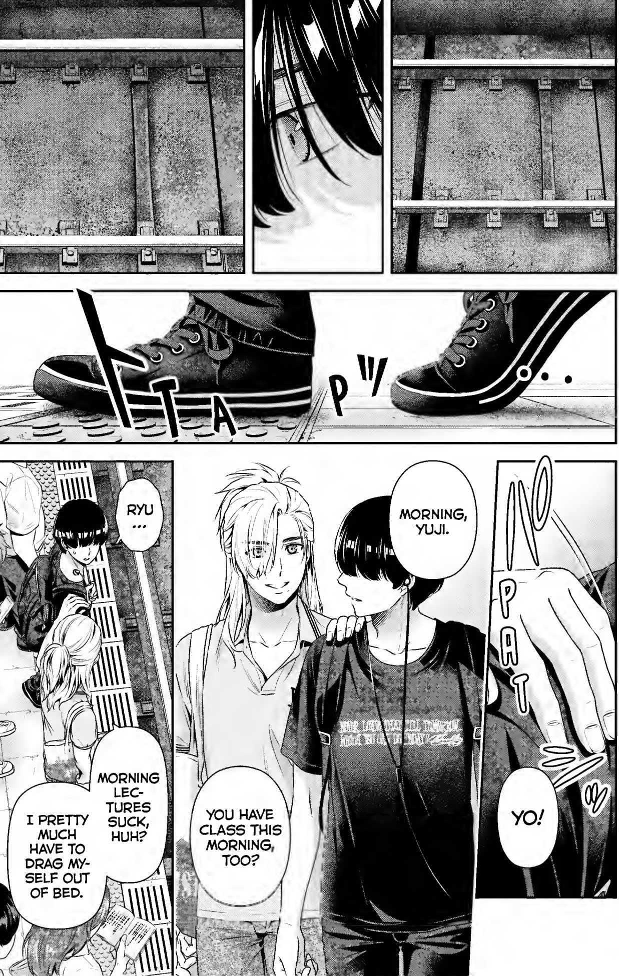

I KNEW YOU'D SHOW.
YOU HAD SUCH A LONELY LOOK IN YOUR EYES.
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
TONIGHT, LET'S JUST LOSE OURSELVES IN A DREAM.
IT'S ALL RIGHT.
TONIGHT...
...LET'S JUST...
...LOSE OURSELVES IN A DREAM.
ピクッ
TWITCH

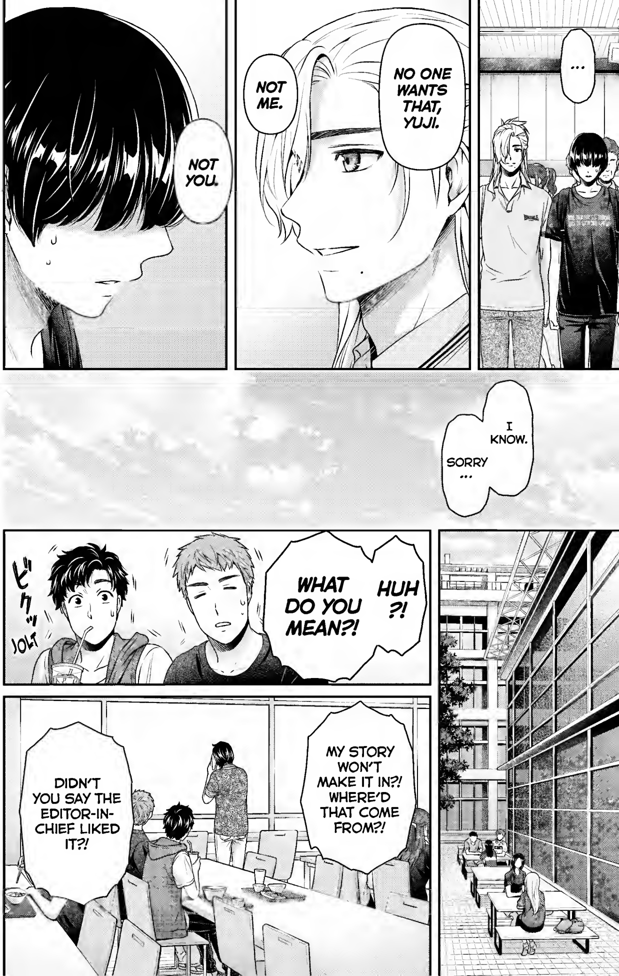

AH!
MMF.
AAH!
ススス…
SLIP
TRRRRR
FWIP
バッ
!
TRRRRRR
TRRRRRR
TRRRRRR
TRRRRRR

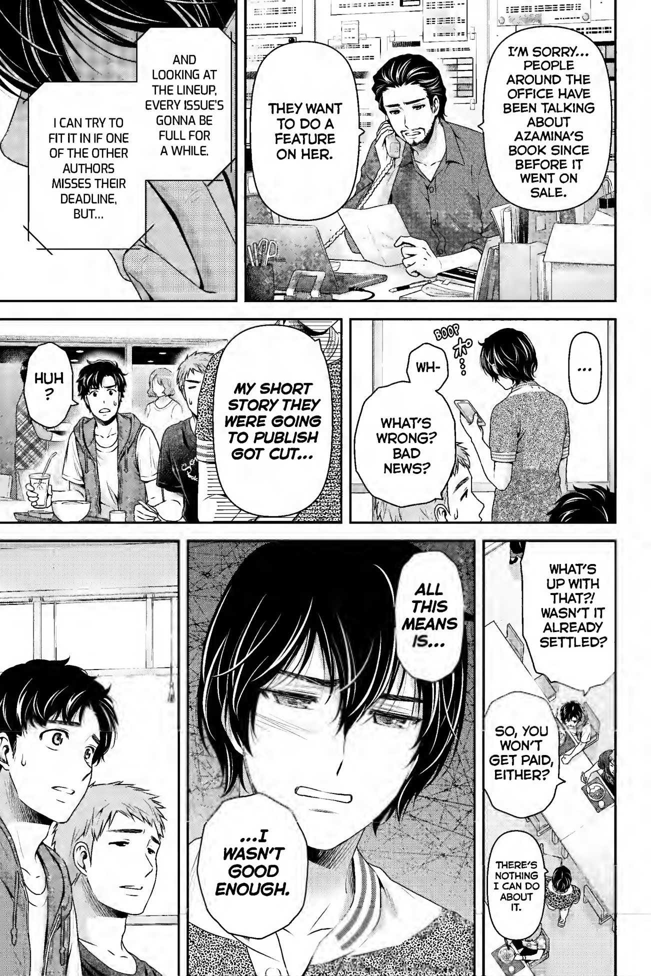

YUKA
HELLO? YUKA?
HEY, MIYABI.
YOU SEEMED LIKE YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT GETTING INTO CHARACTER TODAY...
...SO I WAS JUST WONDERING HOW YOU'RE DOING.
ARE YOU BUSY RIGHT NOW?
OH.
NO...
I THOUGHT OF A FEW MOVIES THAT MIGHT GIVE YOU SOME IDEAS.
HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF *IN THE MOON'S EMBRACE?*
I HAVEN'T.
LET ME WRITE IT DOWN.
THERE'S ALSO *LOVE TRAP, YOUNG KILLERS,* AND...
I WAS JUST WATCHING *LOVE TRAP.*
REALLY? THAT MIGHT BE THE CLOSEST TO THE ROLE.
MAY-BE.
YEAH.
UH-HUH. THAT'S TRUE.
I'LL GIVE THE OTHERS A WATCH.
THANKS.
BOOP
ポッ

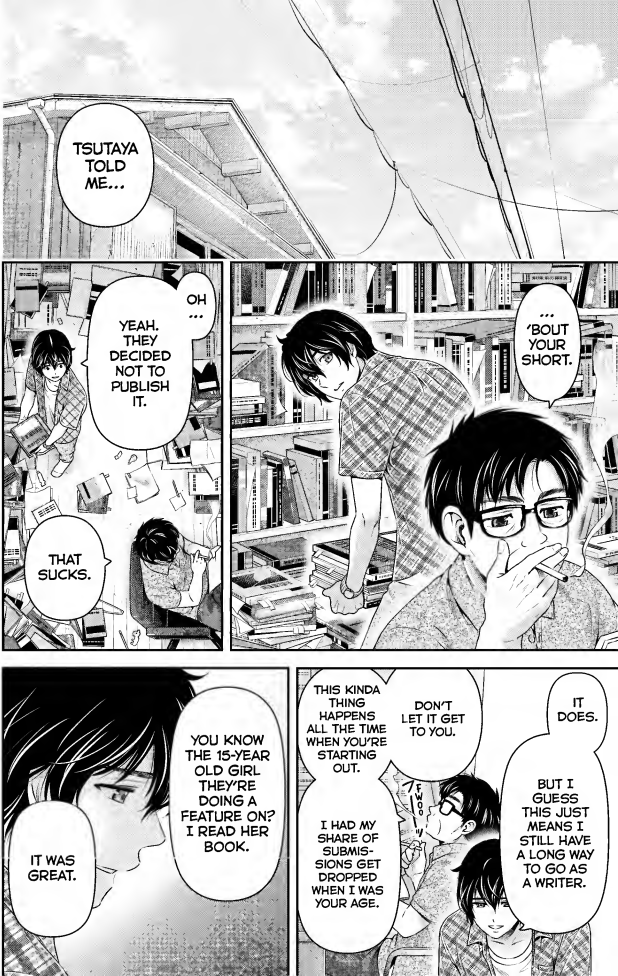

GA
SP
I...
I SHOULD PUT SOME CLOTHES ON.
NO ONE KNOWS HOW I FEEL.
カチ TIK
カチッ TIK
BUT THAT'S OKAY.
GROUP
MY LOVE FOR YOU IS ALL I NEED.
ALL I NEED.
I WON'T LET HER...
...STEAL YOUR SMILE FROM ME.

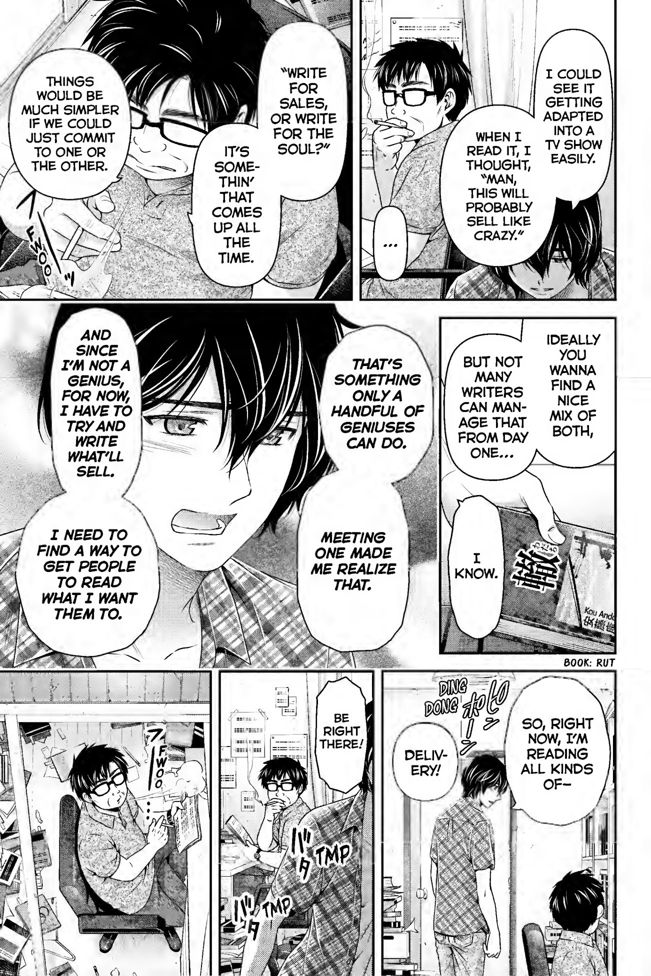

SO, LIKE...
THERE'S MORE?
OH!
LOOK, IT'S HIYAMA-SEMPAI.
HUH? WHERE?
OVER THERE.
OH, YEAH. I'M SURPRISED YOU FOUND HIM.
HE'S PRETTY EASY TO SPOT.
HE ALWAYS DRESSES IN ALL BLACK.
TRUE.
I WONDER IF HE'S PICKY ABOUT HIS CLOTHES.
LIKE STEVE JOBS, Y'KNOW?
THE TRAIN WILL BE ARRIVING AT PLATFORM ONE SHORTLY.
FOR YOUR SAFETY, PLEASE STAND BEHIND THE YELLOW LINE.


TAP
...
PAT
PAT
YO!
MORNING, YUJI.
YOU HAVE CLASS THIS MORNING, TOO?
RYU...
MORNING LECTURES SUCK, HUH?
I PRETTY MUCH HAVE TO DRAG MYSELF OUT OF BED.

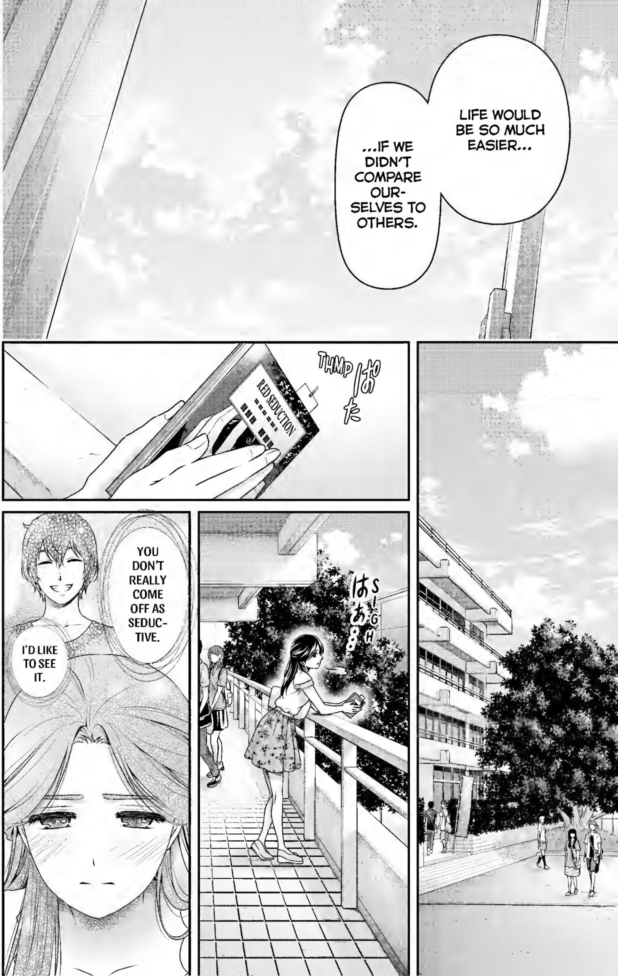

...
NO ONE WANTS THAT, YUJI.
NOT ME.
NOT YOU.
I KNOW.
SORRY...
HUH?!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!
ビクッ
JOLT
MY STORY WON'T MAKE IT IN?! WHERE'D THAT COME FROM?!
DIDN'T YOU SAY THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF LIKED IT?!

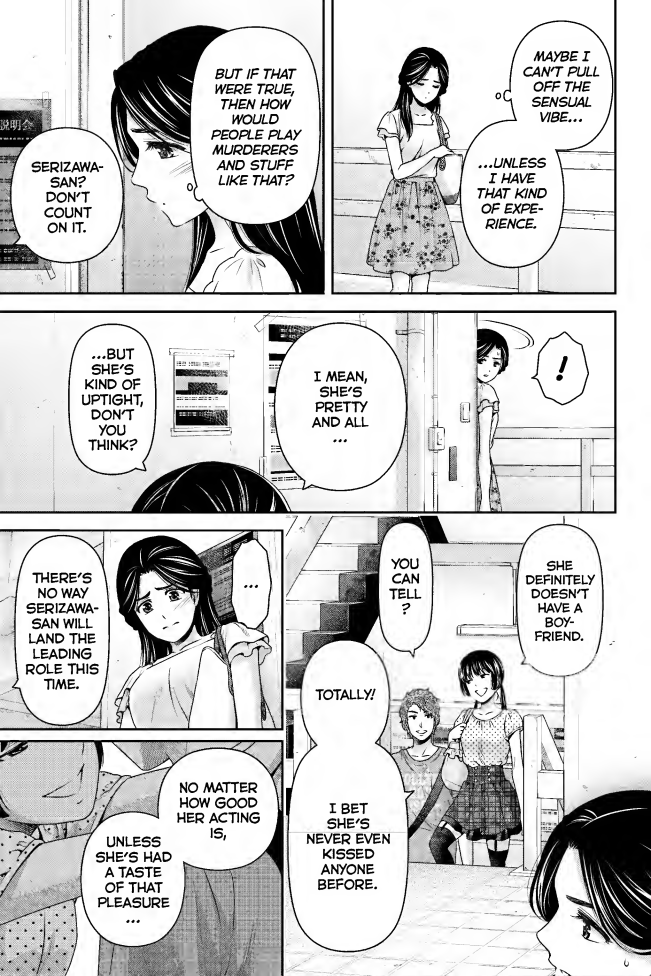

I'M SORRY... PEOPLE AROUND THE OFFICE HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT AZAMINA'S BOOK SINCE BEFORE IT WENT ON SALE.
THEY WANT TO DO A FEATURE ON HER.
AND LOOKING AT THE LINEUP, EVERY ISSUE'S GONNA BE FULL FOR A WHILE.
I CAN TRY TO FIT IT IN IF ONE OF THE OTHER AUTHORS MISSES THEIR DEADLINE, BUT...
...
BOOP
ポ…
WH-
WHAT'S WRONG? BAD NEWS?
*MY SHORT STORY THEY WERE GOING TO PUBLISH GOT CUT...*
HUH?
WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?! WASN'T IT ALREADY SETTLED?
SO, YOU WON'T GET PAID, EITHER?
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT.
*ALL THIS MEANS IS...*
*...I WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH.*

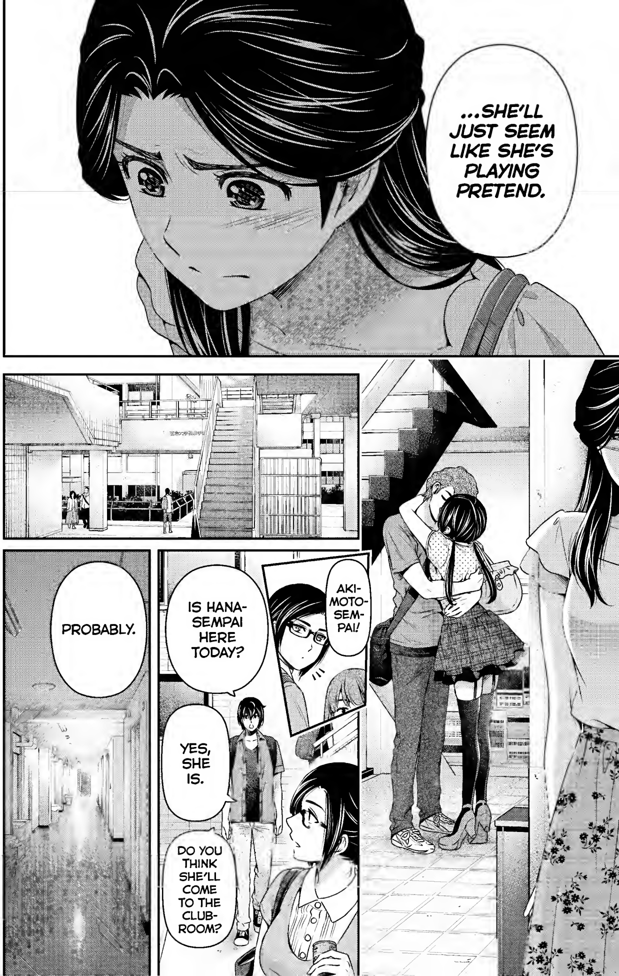

TSUTAYA TOLD ME...
... 'BOUT YOUR SHORT.
OH ...
YEAH. THEY DECIDED NOT TO PUBLISH IT.
THAT SUCKS.
IT DOES.
BUT I GUESS THIS JUST MEANS I STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO AS A WRITER.
DON'T LET IT GET TO YOU.
THIS KINDA THING HAPPENS ALL THE TIME WHEN YOU'RE STARTING OUT.
FWOO
I HAD MY SHARE OF SUBMISSIONS GET DROPPED WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE.
YOU KNOW THE 15-YEAR OLD GIRL THEY'RE DOING A FEATURE ON? I READ HER BOOK.
IT WAS GREAT.

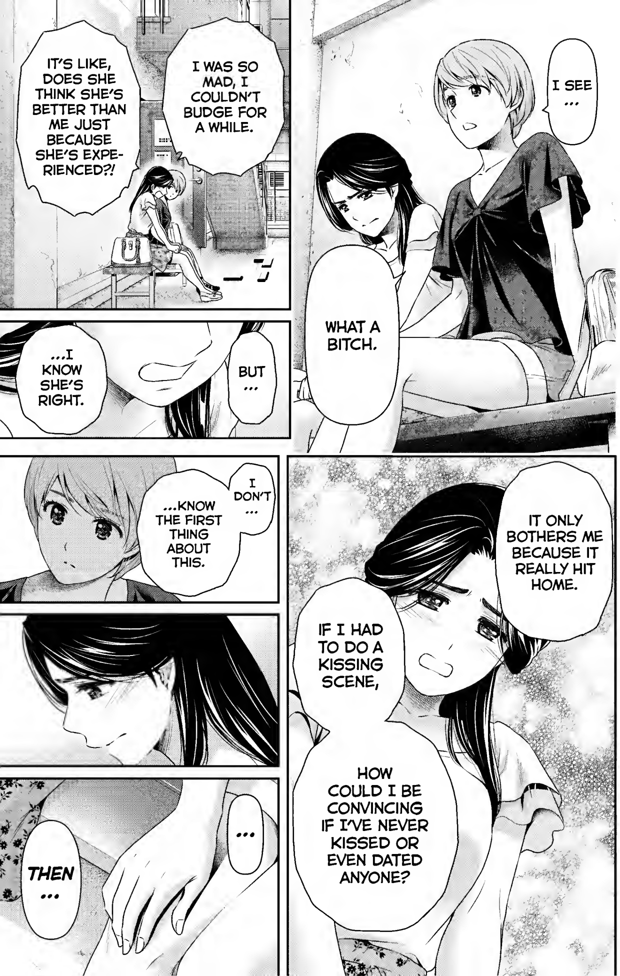

I COULD SEE IT GETTING ADAPTED INTO A TV SHOW EASILY.
WHEN I READ IT, I THOUGHT, "MAN, THIS WILL PROBABLY SELL LIKE CRAZY."
...
"WRITE FOR SALES, OR WRITE FOR THE SOUL?"
IT'S SOMETHIN' THAT COMES UP ALL THE TIME.
THINGS WOULD BE MUCH SIMPLER IF WE COULD JUST COMMIT TO ONE OR THE OTHER.
FWOO ッ
IDEALLY YOU WANNA FIND A NICE MIX OF BOTH,
BUT NOT MANY WRITERS CAN MANAGE THAT FROM DAY ONE...
I KNOW.
Kou Ando
THAT'S SOMETHING ONLY A HANDFUL OF GENIUSES CAN DO.
MEETING ONE MADE ME REALIZE THAT.
AND SINCE I'M NOT A GENIUS, FOR NOW, I HAVE TO TRY AND WRITE WHAT'LL SELL.
I NEED TO FIND A WAY TO GET PEOPLE TO READ WHAT I WANT THEM TO.
SO, RIGHT NOW, I'M READING ALL KINDS OF–
DING DONG
DELIVERY!
BE RIGHT THERE!
バタ TMP
バタ TMP
FWOO
...

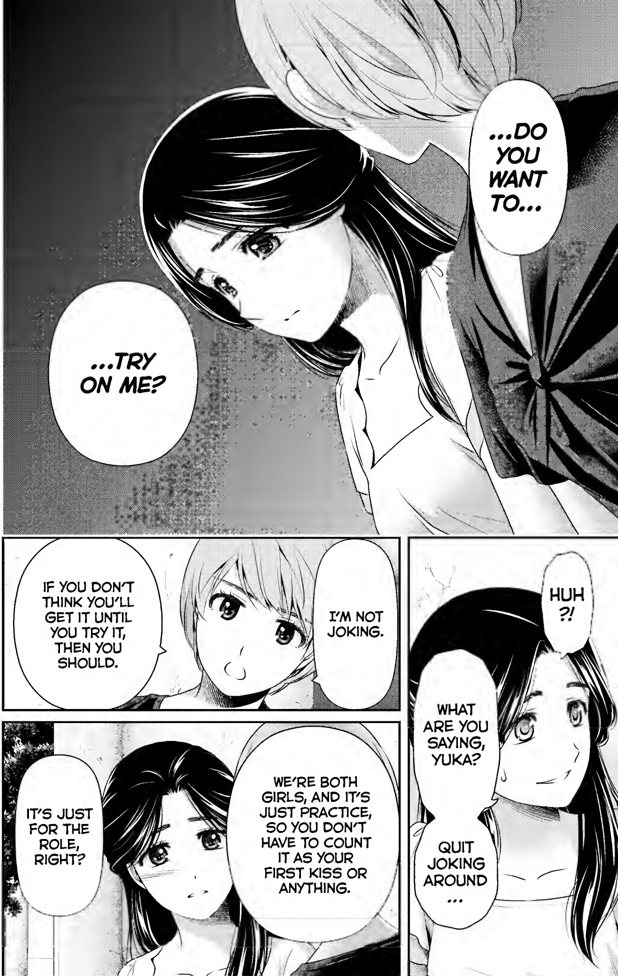
BOOK: RUT

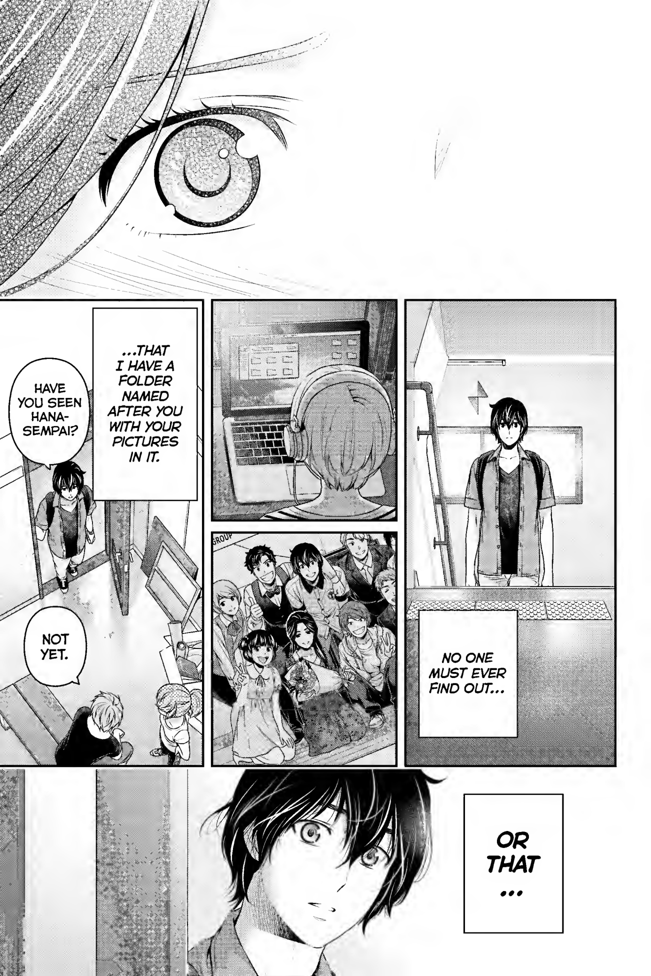

LIFE WOULD BE SO MUCH EASIER…
…IF WE DIDN'T COMPARE OURSELVES TO OTHERS.
THMP ぱた
RED SEDUCTION
はぁ… SIGH
YOU DON'T REALLY COME OFF AS SEDUCTIVE.
I'D LIKE TO SEE IT.

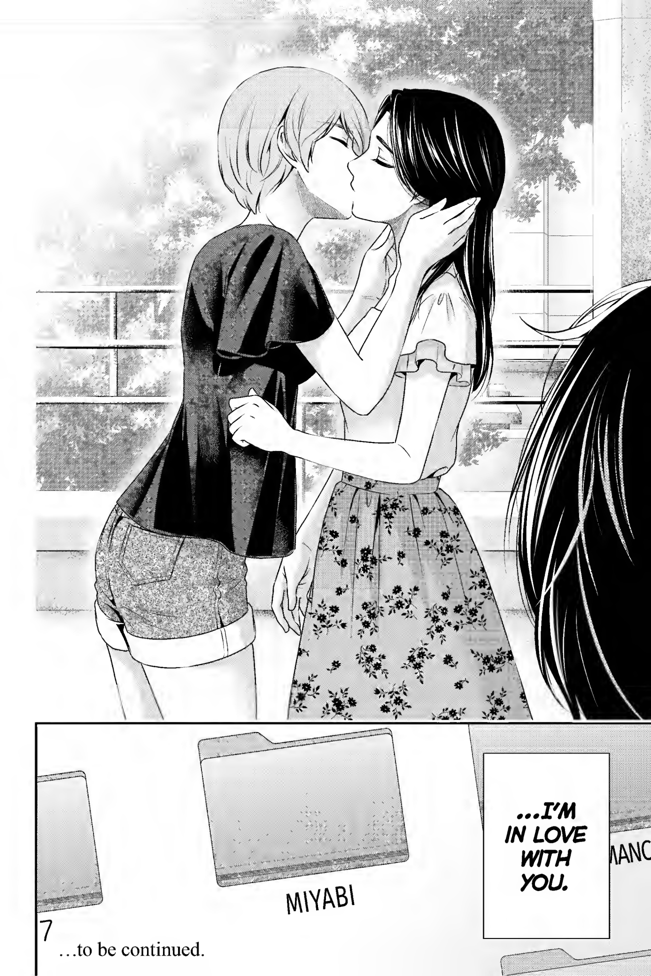

MAYBE I CAN'T PULL OFF THE SENSUAL VIBE...
...UNLESS I HAVE THAT KIND OF EXPERIENCE.
BUT IF THAT WERE TRUE, THEN HOW WOULD PEOPLE PLAY MURDERERS AND STUFF LIKE THAT?
SERIZAWA-SAN? DON'T COUNT ON IT.
説明会
!
I MEAN, SHE'S PRETTY AND ALL...
...BUT SHE'S KIND OF UPTIGHT, DON'T YOU THINK?
SHE DEFINITELY DOESN'T HAVE A BOYFRIEND.
YOU CAN TELL?
TOTALLY!
I BET SHE'S NEVER EVEN KISSED ANYONE BEFORE.
...
THERE'S NO WAY SERIZAWA-SAN WILL LAND THE LEADING ROLE THIS TIME.
NO MATTER HOW GOOD HER ACTING IS,
UNLESS SHE'S HAD A TASTE OF THAT PLEASURE...


...SHE'LL JUST SEEM LIKE SHE'S PLAYING PRETEND.
AKIMOTO-SEMPAI!
IS HANA-SEMPAI HERE TODAY?
YES, SHE IS.
DO YOU THINK SHE'LL COME TO THE CLUBROOM?
PROBABLY.


I SEE ...
WHAT A BITCH.
I WAS SO MAD, I COULDN'T BUDGE FOR A WHILE.
IT'S LIKE, DOES SHE THINK SHE'S BETTER THAN ME JUST BECAUSE SHE'S EXPERIENCED?!
...I KNOW SHE'S RIGHT.
BUT ...
IT ONLY BOTHERS ME BECAUSE IT REALLY HIT HOME.
IF I HAD TO DO A KISSING SCENE,
HOW COULD I BE CONVINCING IF I'VE NEVER KISSED OR EVEN DATED ANYONE?
I DON'T ...
...KNOW THE FIRST THING ABOUT THIS.
...
THEN ...


...DO YOU WANT TO...
...TRY ON ME?
HUH?!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING, YUKA?
QUIT JOKING AROUND ...
I'M NOT JOKING.
IF YOU DON'T THINK YOU'LL GET IT UNTIL YOU TRY IT, THEN YOU SHOULD.
WE'RE BOTH GIRLS, AND IT'S JUST PRACTICE, SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO COUNT IT AS YOUR FIRST KISS OR ANYTHING.
IT'S JUST FOR THE ROLE, RIGHT?


NO ONE MUST EVER FIND OUT...
GROUP
...THAT I HAVE A FOLDER NAMED AFTER YOU WITH YOUR PICTURES IN IT.
HAVE YOU SEEN HANA-SEMPAI?
NOT YET.
OR THAT...


...I'M IN LOVE WITH YOU.
MANC
MIYABI
7

…to be continued.